

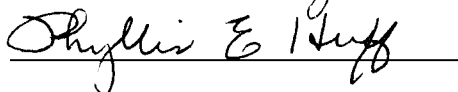
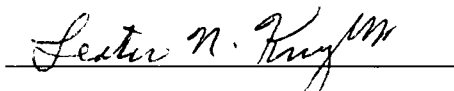
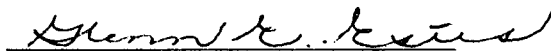
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Pamela Gail Browning entitled "A Qualitative Study of Literacy Instruction in Kindergarten." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.



J. Amos Hatch, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance.



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN KINDERGARTEN

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Pamela Gail Browning
August 1995

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Gene, and my daughters, Melody and Morgan, for eating fast food for five years, for encouraging me when I wanted to quit, for holding me when I cried, and for celebrating the milestones along the way. You are the best!

Acknowledgments

There are many people to whom I am grateful for their help and encouragement as I completed my program. Many friends, family members, colleagues, and students offered encouragement and support throughout the past five years. To them I express my love and appreciation.

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Finally, to the Source of my strength be all honor, glory, and praise.

Abstract

The study was a descriptive study of literacy instruction in kindergarten and the influences on teachers' planning and implementation of literacy instruction. Passive participant observation, interviewing, and unobtrusive data collection were the data gathering methods used in the study. Data for the study were collected over a three month period and included field notes of the literacy instruction in 12 kindergarten classrooms and transcripts of 14 interviews with kindergarten teachers.

The goal of the study was to provide a description of the literacy instruction of one group of kindergarten teachers and the influences on their planning and implementation of literacy instruction. Findings from data collected on literacy instruction were reported as descriptions of reading instruction and writing instruction. Data analysis revealed three areas of influence on teachers' planning and implementation of literacy instruction: (a) curriculum influences, (b) personal philosophy influences, and (c) time influences.

The following general conclusions were drawn from the findings: (a) Literacy instruction in kindergarten is alphabet driven; (b) Literacy activities utilized by the teachers reflected both reading readiness practice and emergent literacy practice; (c) Teachers based literacy instruction on curriculum influences, personal philosophy influences, and time influences rather than on a particular formal philosophy; (d) Developing a personal teaching style is an idiosyncratic, dynamic process.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the literacy instruction of young children has been influenced by a paradigm shift away from a reading readiness approach (Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

Reading readiness is an approach to early literacy instruction that "gets children ready" to learn to read in first grade. The activities associated with reading readiness include those activities presumed to be precursors of reading such as letter naming and exercises related to sound/symbol relationships, visual discrimination, and word relationships (i.e., rhyming, opposites, word families). The reading readiness perspective developed as a result of maturationist and behaviorist thought. While differing greatly in their views of how children learned, both viewed reading as occurring at a specified point in a child's life--typically during the first year of school.

Reading readiness assumes that there is a certain point at which children learn to read. In 1931, Morphett and Washburne conducted a study assessing reading achievement. They concluded that children with a mental age of six years six months made better progress than younger children. Therefore, six years six months came to be regarded as the optimal age for children to learn to read. The notion that first graders (roughly age six years six months) should be reading is still widespread today.

While many maturationists such as Arnold Gesell advocated simply withholding instruction until a child was ready to read, the popularity in the 1930s and 1940s of behaviorism and of standardized testing supported those who wished to help children become "ready for reading" (Morrow, 1989). Tests were developed to examine the

mastery of certain skills purported to be indicative of reading readiness. Gradually, the skills on these tests became the focus of the kindergarten curriculum. Getting children ready to read became the goal of kindergarten, the year that preceded first grade and the magical age of six years six months.

The concept of reading readiness became even more pervasive when publishers began including a readiness level textbook in their series of graded readers. These readiness books adhered to the notion that getting ready to read involved mastering a series of sequenced skills and subskills. It was assumed that children who were capable of identifying the letters of the alphabet, who could segment and blend phonemes, who could visually discriminate print, who had developed left-to-right eye progression and visual motor skills, who could auditorially discriminate sounds, and who had developed such large motor skills as hopping, skipping, and catching a ball or bean bag were ready to learn to read. The maturationist tenet that children should wait for instruction had been supplanted by the behaviorist construct that adult knowledge should be broken down into isolated skills, sequenced and taught on a mastery basis.

In recent years, the rise of interactionist/constructivist theory, influenced primarily by the work of John Dewey and Jean Piaget, has affected virtually every area of the curriculum. For example, mathematics and science instruction has experienced a renewed emphasis on hands-on/activity-based approaches. In literacy instruction, the emphasis has shifted from a reading readiness perspective to one of emergent literacy. A well-known adage of the interactionist/constructivist theory is that "a child constructs his or her own knowledge through interaction with his or her environment." This view shifts the focus of

attention to the process of becoming literate. Emergent literacy advocates believe this process begins virtually at birth when an infant begins to learn oral language. The emergent literacy perspective seeks to validate the early literacy efforts of children and views literacy development as a continuum rather than a sequential series of skills or a particular stage of development.

The concept of emergent literacy has evolved inductively. Researchers and educators have examined literature on such topics as how early readers come to reading (Durkin, 1966), the literacy-like behaviors of the very young (Ferreiro, 1986), and oral language acquisition (Snow, 1983). They have induced that literacy is a much more natural process than previously believed (Clay, 1975; Bissess, 1980). Children are seen as coming to school with many literacy concepts and skills already established. Researchers and early childhood professionals adhering to an emergent literacy perspective believe that teachers should take a child's existing knowledge, build on it, and promote literacy development through activities that reflect the meaningful and natural manner in which the child learned what he already knows (Morrow, 1989).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

One of the unique aspects of becoming a teacher is the opportunity to develop a personal style of teaching. The development of that style is an idiosyncratic process influenced by a variety of experiences. The first source of influence probably stems from the teacher's own experiences as a student. Secondly, before becoming certified to teach, a person must complete a series of methods courses that are presumably designed to

reflect current research. This experience is followed closely by an internship period under an experienced teacher. After accepting a position as a teacher, common practice is to stay current by attending inservice meetings provided by the local school system, attending seminars and workshops on topics of interest, reading professional literature, completing additional college courses, and sharing ideas with colleagues. A teacher's style is also influenced by the experience gained in the trial and errors of everyday teaching. The teacher learns of an interesting idea or technique and tries it. If the idea seems to achieve satisfactory results, it is added to her repertoire. If it fails, it is dropped.

An additional significant influence on teaching style comes from the materials and standards adopted by the local school system. Teachers rely on the teacher manuals that accompany student textbooks to varying degrees. Some seem to follow the directions religiously while others use the guides as resources for ideas and practice opportunities. Similarly, lists of objectives adopted by either the state or the local school system determine much of the content that is taught--but not necessarily the methods by which it is taught.

A natural consequence of the various influences on teaching practice is that no two teachers at any grade level are alike. This seems to be especially true of kindergarten teachers. One possible explanation for the variety of styles exhibited by kindergarten teachers is the lack of programmed materials (for example, reading series) which are routinely adopted for other grade levels. While kindergarten teachers typically have state adopted or district adopted objectives for their students, they frequently have no teachers' manuals that they are mandated to follow.

As a former kindergarten teacher and a current undergraduate methods instructor for prospective kindergarten teachers, I am interested in what influences kindergarten teaching practice especially in the area of literacy instruction. A common frustration of researchers and undergraduate methods instructors is that practice based on current research often seems to take a secondary role to other influences in the development of teaching practice. Troyer and Yopp (1990) refer to this concern as an "ongoing educational problem--the lack of timely dissemination of research information to teachers" (p.39). On the other hand, a common frustration of novice teachers is the perceptible disparity between the methods they have learned at the university and the "reality" of the elementary classroom (Chester, 1992).

This phenomenon prompted the current study. I attempted to explore what influences the teaching practice of kindergarten teachers. I chose to focus my attention on literacy instruction because of the paradigm shift from the reading readiness approach to an emergent literacy approach. It was my contention that an area in a state of flux would more likely show a variety of influences than a subject that has experienced little change for a number of years.

Two broad questions guided this study. The first was "What are the literacy practices of kindergarten teachers?" The second question was "What influences the literacy instruction of kindergarten teachers?"

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theoretical perspectives have influenced my personal philosophy of how individuals learn. They are: (a) cognitive developmental thought emanating from the work of Jean Piaget; (b) Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory; and (c) symbolic interactionism posited by Herbert Blumer.

Cognitive Developmental Theory

Piaget formulated the clinical interview to assess children's reasoning abilities. Children were given tasks which became progressively more difficult and asked to explain their solutions after each task. This method of assessing reasoning ability led Piaget to believe that "knowledge was constructed by the children through interaction with the environment" (Schickedanz, 1990, p. 4).

Piaget proposed that all children progress through four stages of development which he labeled as the sensorimotor stage (birth through approximately age two), the preoperational stage (ages two through seven), concrete operations stage (ages seven through twelve), and formal operations stage (ages 12 through adult). Kindergarten children are typically classified in the preoperational stage.

Wadsworth (1984) summarizes the characteristics of the preoperational child:

There is rapid development of representational skills including spoken language, which accompanies the rapid conceptual development of the period....A child's thought is egocentric in that, unable to assume the view points of others, he (or she) believes that everything he thinks is correct. In conservation

problems he is unaware of transformations of states and tends to "center" on perceptual aspects of problems. By age 7, thought is prelogical. Conflicts between perception and reasoning are generally resolved in favor of perception...Children begin to reason about rules and justice, but they have not yet developed a concept of intentionality. (p. 173)

Although Piaget did not specify a teaching methodology or a curriculum, others such as Wadsworth (1978, 1984) have sought to apply Piagetian theory to education (see also, Elkind, 1976; Forman & Kushner, 1977; Furth, 1970; Kamii & DeVries, 1978; Schwebel and Raph, 1973). Wadsworth's (1978) description of the teacher as the organizer of the learning environment, assessor of the child's thinking, and initiator of group activities is representative of the implications of Piagetian theory for teaching. Berk (1993) gives three educational principles based on Piagetian theory:

- (a) Children learn through self-discovery (often referred to as discovery learning).
- (b) Learning experiences should build upon the child's current level of thinking.
- (c) Children proceed through the stages at their own individual rates necessitating individualized and small group instruction and de-emphasizing arbitrary means of evaluating children's progress.

Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky focused on the effects of culture on the child's development. While he viewed children as being active in their learning, he saw cognitive growth as being a

socially mediated process "dependent on the support that adults and more mature peers provide as children try new tasks" (Beck, 1993, p. 29). Vygotsky observed what he termed the "zone of proximal development." The zone of proximal development described those tasks which were too difficult for a child to accomplish alone but could successfully complete with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other. This led Vygotsky to advocate assisted discovery as a more efficient method of instruction than self-discovery. Several recent studies support the notion of assisted discovery (Azmitia, 1988; Behrend, Rosengren, & Perlmutter, 1992; Radziszewska & Rogoff, 1988).

Symbolic Interactionism

The term "symbolic interactionism" was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Blumer, 1969). Blumer attributed the approach to general similarities among the work of many scholars including George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, and William James. Blumer (1969) presented three basic premises upon which symbolic interactionism is based:

- 1) Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
- 2) The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
- 3) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p.2)

Blumer acknowledged that several theories shared the first premise but contended that it was the second and third premises that distinguish symbolic interactionism. He explained the second premise in this manner:

The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person. Thus, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. (pp. 4-5)

Thus, according to symbolic interactionism, meaning is socially constructed.

Blumer went on to explain the third premise:

The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups and transform the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. Accordingly, interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action. (p.5)

This established the notion that meanings are dynamic rather than static.

Conclusion

While I am influenced by the three theories mentioned, I have reservations about all of them. In essence, my own theory of learning "proves" Blumer's second and third premises; my own personally constructed "meaning" changes frequently as I encounter different ideas. I must admit that I doggedly believe that truth exists, but I agree that each person has his or her own interpretation of what that "truth" is. For example, Blumer classifies objects as either physical, social, or abstract. My difficulty centers around the

physical objects. I hold that a cow (a "physical" object according to Blumer's classification system) is a cow despite the varying meanings different people may place on it. I agree that a cow has a somewhat different meaning for a rancher or for a Hindu priest than it might for me. However, there is a nucleus of meaning about which I believe we would all agree. In literacy terms, I think we would all agree on the denotative meaning of a cow while differing on the connotative meanings we attribute to one.

Another point of contention concerns the fact that some would see the philosophies of Piaget and Vygotsky as being in conflict. I would agree that the two philosophies differ on some points (for example, the issue of private speech), but I draw from both. From Piaget, I take the concept of an active learner, one who interprets or redefines new experiences according to existing schemata. I find his description of the preoperational child to be consistent with my own observations of kindergarten children. Obviously, the description does not accurately describe every five-year-old child but does illuminate the notion that young children think differently than adults whether or not this indicates stages of cognitive development or premature adult logic.

I differ with Piaget and accept Vygotskian theory in my belief that children benefit from assisted discovery as well as self-discovery. I agree with Vygotsky in his assertion that learning should be viewed in the context of cultural influences.

Relating to this study, my observance of the many influences on the teaching practices of kindergarten teachers leads naturally to my adherence to a symbolic interactionist stance. I believe that each teacher has his or her own belief system about what constitutes good kindergarten teaching and that consciously or unconsciously that

belief is being constantly redefined. Furthermore, that belief system is unique to each individual. The uniqueness of each person's belief system can be attributed to the varying interactions each has experienced. Earlier I described the trial and error approach used by many teachers in arriving at what they consider best practice. Interestingly, a technique that one teacher considers to be futile is often viewed by another teacher as being extremely worthwhile. This illustrates that "goodness" is not in the technique itself but in the construction of reality of each teacher based on his or her experience.

I agree with Guthrie and Hall (1992) who illustrate the interactionist influence on classroom practice when they state:

...in the interactional give-and-take of everyday conversation, people negotiate their understanding of one another and the world. Unless educational research can get at how these interactions are conducted, it is argued, important features of the processes of teaching and learning will be overlooked.

(p. 95)

In summary, I believe that each teacher constructs a belief system about what constitutes effective literacy instructional practice through his or her interactions with administrators, peers, parents, students, and materials. This study is an attempt to describe such practice and to explore teachers' perceptions of the factors that influence that practice.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Following this introductory chapter is a review of pertinent literature concerned with the literacy development of young children and literacy instruction. This chapter is succeeded by a description of the methodology utilized in this study. The next two chapters detail the findings organized around the two research questions. The final chapter reports conclusions based on the findings and implications for educators.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emergent literacy is a broad term encompassing all aspects of reading and writing, making the literature widely diversified. It includes such topics as reading aloud to children, environmental print, and process writing. Reading readiness research tends to focus on beginning reading and phonics. However, these categories are not exclusive to either viewpoint, and the same topics are often addressed by both.

In my literature search, I have examined any example that I could locate related to kindergarten children and literacy. Several significant studies involving preschool children are also included. For ease of reporting, I have made divisions between reading and writing, identifying subcategories when appropriate. Studies are arranged within each subcategory in chronological order. Because my research interest is in literacy instruction in kindergarten, whether influenced by a reading readiness perspective or an emergent literacy perspective, a final section involves a review of the literature on teaching methodology.

READING

A plethora of writings exist related to beginning reading and more recently to emergent literacy. This literature can be divided into three categories: (a) "how-to" articles based on research but not reports of research themselves, (b) reviews of research and related materials, and (c) reports of research studies. What follows is a sampling of research studies primarily concerned with the literacy development of five-year-old

children whether in the kindergarten or preschool setting. The studies examined fall into two distinct categories, Storybook Reading and Phonics, and one rather nebulous category, Reading Process and Achievement. "Storybook Reading" encompasses studies about its effects on such measures as vocabulary development and listening comprehension and the effects of repeated readings and group size. The "Phonics" category includes studies about such concepts as phonemic awareness and segmentation ability. "Reading Process and Achievement" has become somewhat of a catch-all category for studies about such topics as models of reading, achievement related factors, children's emergent readings of trade books, and environmental print.

Storybook Reading

Storybook reading is a practice traditionally advocated by all early childhood educators regardless of perspective; however, the practice of adults reading storybooks aloud to children is particularly promoted by emergent literacy advocates as a method of exposing young children to literacy concepts in a holistic manner. Emergent literacy further recommends repeated readings to develop familiarity with print and to assist children in developing various literacy concepts.

In the well-known report Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985), the authors make the following statement about reading instruction in the home: "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 23). They continued by specifying that the benefits are

greatest when children are engaged as active participants through discussion of stories and assistance in learning letter identification, word identification, and word meanings.

Martinez and Roser (1985) explored the value of repeated storybook reading by examining audiotaped readings in one home case study and one preschool classroom. They discovered that the children's comments about the text approximately doubled on subsequent readings. There tended to be more questions than comments on initial readings. As the children gained familiarity with the books, they were able to focus on different aspects of the stories including story language and various story elements. Their comments showed more depth of understanding with repeated readings. The researchers conclude, "...the children gained increased control over stories they heard more than once" (Martinez & Roser, 1985, p. 786).

The acquisition of word knowledge from written materials was the focus of a study conducted by Eller, Pappas, and Brown (1988). The researchers studied the re-readings of storybooks by kindergarten children. A researcher first read a book to the children, none of whom were independent readers, and then asked the children to read it back in any fashion they could. This procedure was repeated three times with the same book over a period of days. Eller, Pappas, and Brown targeted 20 words deemed unfamiliar to the children and noted the children's use of those words in the subsequent readings in order to determine if vocabulary was gained from repeated readings of storybooks. Through statistical analysis, the authors determined that although vocabulary growth seems to be a gradual process, the children did learn new words incidentally through written context.

Morrow and Smith (1990) found that reading to either small groups or individuals rather than to entire classes enhanced the development of certain literacy concepts. The investigators read books to children individually, to small groups of three children, and to entire classes. The effects tested were comprehension and verbal interchange (comments and questions). They found that the children in small groups scored higher on comprehension measures than either single children or whole groups. Verbal interchange among the children and with the adult reader was higher with both individual children and small groups than with entire classes.

Stories were read to Arab kindergarten children to determine the effects on listening comprehension and on a picture-storytelling task (Feitelson, Goldstein, Iraqi, & Share, 1993). The children involved in this study lived in a diglossic situation. Diglossia is defined in the study as "the presence of a high and low style or standard in a language, one for formal use in writing and some speech situations and one for colloquial use" (Harris & Hodges, 1981, p.88). At the beginning of kindergarten, these children had been exposed primarily to only the colloquial dialect of Aamiyya and had little exposure to FusHa which is the literary Arabic language. Stories without illustrations were repeatedly read to the children in FusHa over a five month period. Their performances on the listening comprehension measure and the picture-storytelling task were compared to the performances of a control group that had been exposed to a language development program developed by the Ministry of Education in Israel. The children exposed to the repeated storybook readings performed significantly higher on the listening comprehension measure and on causality (ability to draw inferential conclusions on the basis of picture

clues), story beginnings (an attempt to assess familiarity with story conventions), and two vocabulary measures. There was no significant difference in story endings. The researchers found three results they felt were significant: (a) regular story reading proved an effective way to familiarize kindergarten children with literary language; (b) teachers in the experimental classes changed their attitudes toward the desirability of reading to the children in the literary language and as a result became more aware of the language they were modeling for the children; and (c) because of the enthusiasm the children displayed toward the stories, some parents became more interested in reading to their children, a practice reported as unusual due to the diglossic situation.

Modest gains in vocabulary were found in kindergartners who were read stories designed to define unfamiliar words through context clues (Robbins & Ehri, 1994). Each story was read twice, and the children were tested using a multiple choice format on their knowledge of 22 words deemed unfamiliar to kindergarten-age children. Only half of these words appeared in the stories. Each word occurred either once or twice resulting in the children hearing the words either two or four times. Gains were greatest if the words were repeated four times. Statistical analysis revealed that children who began the study with larger vocabularies, as evidenced on Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test--Revised (PPVT-R), made more significant gains than children with smaller vocabularies.

Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, & Linn (1994) used a variety of measures (Early Reading Test, Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, Wide Range Achievement Test, CIRCUS Listening Test, The Language and Problem Solving Battery, Chicago Reading Test, California Achievement Test, Stanford Achievement Test, Test of Basic

Experiences, and Woodcock Reading Mastery Test) to test the correlation between adults reading storybooks aloud to children and children's reading achievement scores as indicated by the various tests. They found a negative correlation between the amount of time adults spent reading to children in kindergarten and their reading achievement. The authors admitted that the measures employed "did weigh very heavily on the decoding side of reading" (Meyer, et al., 1994, p. 80) as opposed to comprehension measures. There was a moderate positive relationship between adults' story reading and the listening measure of the CIRCUS. The authors stated:

The idea that made most sense as an explanation of the negative relationship between the time teachers spent reading to children and performance in reading was a displacement theory--The amount of time that the adults spent reading stories may have displaced something else--activities involving written text--and that positively affect children's reading achievement. (p. 81)

They cautioned that reading aloud to children involved no "magic" in teaching children to read. They stated that reading aloud to young children should be used along with activities that directly involve children with print.

In summary, the practice of reading aloud to children, especially repeated readings of the same book, appears to be beneficial to young children. Gains include vocabulary development, familiarity with story elements, increased comprehension and enhanced verbal communication skills. While the study by Meyer and colleagues (1994) might suggest that reading aloud is not beneficial, it should be noted that the measures were

correlational rather than causal and that none of the other studies suggested that reading aloud to children benefited their decoding skills which this study emphasized and labeled as "reading achievement."

Phonics

Phonics, due to its segmented rather than holistic nature, is typically associated with reading readiness. In the past, phonics has received a great deal of attention in the research literature. While emergent literacy has drawn some of the focus away from phonics, it continues to be a much discussed and debated aspect of literacy instruction. The following studies are representative of recent research in phonics instruction in kindergarten.

Ball and Blachman (1991) sought to determine if kindergarten children could be taught to segment words into phonemes, to explore the effects of that training on their reading and spelling abilities, and to explore the effects of letter-name and letter-sound training on phonemic segmentation and on reading and spelling abilities. Kindergarten children were assigned to two treatment groups and a control group. The first treatment group received segmentation training and practice in corresponding letter names to letter sounds. The second group only received training with matching letter names and sounds. Ball and Blachman found that the children who received segmentation training made greater gains in this ability than the other two groups, indicating that kindergarten children could be trained to segment phonemes. Both treatment groups scored higher on letter-sound recognition than the control group. The segmentation group also scored higher on reading vocabulary word lists and in matching sounds to letters in attempts at

spelling five words specified in the study. These results lead Ball and Blachman to conclude that phoneme awareness training promotes early reading skill.

In a study by Peterson and Haines (1992) kindergarten children were divided into three groups according to their segmenting ability as demonstrated on the Test of Awareness of Language Segments (TALS). The children were also tested for letter-sound knowledge and reading words by analogy. Each group was provided training on word analogies through the use of onsets and rimes. The children were shown a word such as "cat." It was pronounced and the child asked to repeat it. Then a word with the same rime such as "bat" was placed below "cat," pronounced, and repeated. The researcher made every attempt to show the children the relationship between the two words. After training, the children were again tested on segmentation ability, letter-sound knowledge, and reading words by analogy. Each of the three groups showed significant gains on each measure over the control group which received no training. The high and middle segmenters improved their performances on the word reading by analogy task and the letter-sound test, while the low segmenters gained most in segmentation ability with small but significant gains in letter-sound ability. The authors concluded that "onset-rime segmentation is one level of phonemic awareness whose early emergence can facilitate beginning reading" (Peterson & Haines, 1992, p. 121).

In an attempt to determine whether early training in phoneme awareness would result in improved reading and spelling skills in children enrolled in a whole language kindergarten in New Zealand, Castle, Riach, and Nicholson (1994) conducted two separate experiments involving phoneme awareness training. The first experiment

involved an experimental group which received phoneme awareness training and a control group that was involved in process writing. The results showed that both groups made significant gains in phonemic awareness; however, the experimental group showed greater gains in phonemic awareness and scored significantly better on two of four measures of spelling skill. It is interesting to note that the two measures that did not show significant gains for the experimental group were the dictation test which was designed to "indicate how well children could analyze words that they heard in a dictated sentence and how well they could represent the sounds of those words in written form" (p. 351), and a word writing test to "measure children's ability to generate and write words they knew but on which they had not previously been tested" (p. 351). These two measures seem more applicable to the whole language approach than do the standardized test (Wide Range Achievement Test of Spelling) and a test devised by the researchers to include regular, irregular, and pseudo words. The authors, however, concluded that phonemic awareness training contributes to spelling development.

The second experiment in the Castle, Riach, and Nicholson (1994) study involved a different group of kindergarten age children divided into three subgroups. One received phonemic awareness training, one used the same materials but used them in semantic categorization activities, and the third group received no training. The phonemic awareness group scored slightly higher on the phonemic awareness test, performed better at reading pseudowords, and showed improvement on a dictation test which measured phonemic spelling skills. Again, it is interesting to note that none of these measures

includes semantic or syntactic clues which are seen as being as important as graphophonic clues in most whole language programs.

Davidson and Jenkins (1994) tested the transfer of phonemic segmentation training, phonemic blending training, and a combination of segmentation and blending training on children's abilities to read and spell similar CV (consonant-vowel) pseudowords. Each group was trained until the children achieved mastery on a set of training pseudowords; groups were then tested on a separate set. The segmentation group and combination group performed significantly better than the control group. The blending only group did not. The authors concluded that their findings "suggest that segmentation ability may play a more critical role than blending ability in the very early stages of reading and possibly spelling acquisition" (Davidson & Jenkins, 1994, p. 156).

Stahl and Murray (1994) tested 113 kindergarten and first grade children on a series of phonological awareness tasks to determine the relative importance of linguistic complexity (onset-rime, vowel-coda, cluster onset, and cluster coda) and task differences (blending, segmentation, phoneme isolation, and deletion). They concluded that phoneme isolation was the easiest task for the children followed by blending, deletion, and segmentation. The easiest linguistic level was analyzing onsets and rimes, followed by analyzing vowels and codas, analyzing cluster codas, and analyzing cluster onsets. Through statistical analysis, the authors determined that "it appears that linguistic complexity across tasks is a better way of defining phonological awareness" (p.226). They further concluded that the ability to manipulate onsets and rimes within syllables related most closely with reading ability in young children once an adequate level of letter

recognition is achieved. The ability to isolate a phoneme at either the beginning or the ending of a word was also a good indicator of reading ability.

In summary, these studies generally indicate that training increased children's abilities to perform such tasks as reading and spelling words that adhere to specific patterns and segmenting words into phonemes. Researchers ascertain that these abilities enhance early reading skills. Several of these studies (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Castel, et.al., 1994; and Stahl & Murray, 1994) bring to mind one continuing criticism of phonics instruction: the complete focus on decoding and almost total lack of attention to comprehension. These studies involved training children to segment isolated sounds and in so doing decontextualized the language; there was no mention of comprehension.

Reading Process/Achievement

Researchers continue to gather data that attempt to assist educators in understanding how children approach learning to read and identify what factors contribute to their success or lack of success. The following studies address one or more of these aspects of literacy development.

In her study of two groups of early readers, Durkin (1966) found no connection between early reading and intelligence or socioeconomic status. She found no particular traits or characteristics that separated early readers from non-early readers. Differences were found in the families of the two groups. Parents of the early readers were more likely to respond to their children's requests for assistance in learning to read and to read books to their children repeatedly. Older siblings of early readers were also likely to play a significant role in helping the preschooler learn to read. Durkin also found that for more

than half of the early readers an interest in learning to write either preceded or developed simultaneously with an interest in learning to read.

In the conclusion of The Making of a Reader, an ethnographic study of literacy events in a preschool, Cochran-Smith (1984) states that "encoding and decoding were preceded and supported by a great deal of knowledge about how to use print. Without knowledge of how to use print, the abilities to encode and decode print are meaningless" (Cochran-Smith, 1984, p.258). This assertion supports the emergent literacy view which maintains that literacy development begins long before formal reading instruction.

Masonheimer, Drum, and Ehri (1984) attempted to determine if children progressed naturally from identifying environmental print to word reading. Preschoolers, ages three through five, who could correctly identify eight out of 10 examples of environmental print in context were tested for their ability to identify environmental print out of context and without the logo. Letters were also altered to determine if the children were attending to alphabetic clues. The children were relatively successful at identifying the print out of context yet retaining the logo; however, performance on identifying the print samples without either the context or the logo was poor. The children were unable to detect any alterations in the letters indicating that they were not attending to those particular graphic clues. The authors concluded that environmental print alone does not lead early readers into word reading. This conclusion is in conflict with assumptions drawn from the work of Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1982) and Goodman and Goodman (1979) which maintained that children learn to associate printed words with their context, thereby developing the ability to identify those words.

Lomax and McGee (1987) postulated a developmental model for the acquisition of print-related concepts leading to formal word reading. The five-component model included concepts about print, graphic awareness, phonemic awareness, grapheme-phoneme correspondence knowledge, and word reading. After testing the various components on children ranging in age from three to six, the authors concluded that print and graphic awareness appeared early while the other components appeared later. However, the children did not necessarily master one component before proceeding to the next. In reality, the children continued to expand their knowledge of each of these areas as they grew older.

McGee and Lomax (1988) investigated the attempts of non-word readers, novice word readers, and expert word readers, ages 3 to 6 years, to read one environmental item (a potato chip bag) and eight functional print items. The functional print items included a grocery list, newspaper, TV Guide, book, map, letter, coupon, and a telephone book. McGee and Lomax found the nonreader's attempts to read the print items were highly organized, were similar to the attempts by more experienced readers, and were attentive to graphic detail in some instances. The authors concluded that "letter name knowledge alone does not seem to explain children's shift from using only meaning-oriented strategies to using both meaning and print-oriented strategies for reading environmental and functional print" (p.118).

Shinn-Stricker, House, and Klink (1989) examined the roles of cognitive processing and language development in predicting reading achievement. Their research showed positive and significant relationships between simultaneous processing (the ability

to integrate information from multiple sources and form holistic concepts based on that information), language development, and early reading indicating that simultaneous processing and language development accounted for 22.8% of early reading ability variance. The researchers concluded that their findings support the emergent literacy contention that young children interpret meaning through semantic wholes rather than in a fragmented "skills" manner. This conclusion promotes a holistic approach to teaching reading.

Barnhart (1991) conducted two studies in an effort to quantitatively validate emergent literacy tasks as indicators of literacy achievement. In the first study, conducted with five year olds, she found significant positive correlations between all pairs of four emergent literacy tasks: storybook reading reenactment, writing of isolated words, writing of words as constituents of a sentence, and storywriting and reading. A positive relationship also existed between scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test and the four emergent literacy tasks.

The second study followed the same children into third grade to further validate the emergent literacy tasks as indicative of later reading achievement. Barnhart found that the emergent literacy tasks were positively correlated to the children's scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in third grade. Barnhart concluded, "these early behavioral and conceptual patterns play a legitimate and valid role in the process of becoming literate" (Barnhart, 1991, pp.439-440).

Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) used quantitative and qualitative data to identify four patterns, or paths, of success/nonsuccess in the reading of low-SES, urban children

throughout their kindergarten and first grade years. These paths were: (a) the independent explorer path characterized by extensive knowledge about written language upon entry into school, the ability to interpret school instruction, and independent exploration of reading and writing activity; (b) the curriculum dependent path characterized by little knowledge of written language, inability to make sense of classroom assignments, and dependence upon individualized instruction; (c) the passive non-weaver path described as those children who agree to do what is required but without generalizing the knowledge; and (d) the deferring learner path which referred to one child who began kindergarten with a high level of knowledge but because she could not "reconcile her own written language knowledge with the concepts she met in the skills-based curriculum...became less of a risk taker" (Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991, p. 25). As this child's confidence waned, she began to defer to others to answer for her and came to rely on rigid interpretations of rules. The authors conclude that the most relevant factor in success at beginning reading is experience rather than socioeconomic class and that active learners are more successful than passive learners.

Children's play, metaplay, and productive language competence were examined to determine their correlation with comprehension of a familiar story and unfamiliar story (Williamson & Silvern, 1992). Kindergarten children were assigned to play groups of four children each and read three familiar stories and one unfamiliar story. After each of the three familiar stories, the children were directed to "play" the story. After the third story playing, children were tested using a criterion-referenced test, a story retelling test, and a sequencing test. After the reading of the unfamiliar story, the children did not play the

story but were again tested using the measures above as well as asked to tell a story (to evaluate productive language competence). Metaplay was distinguished from play in the following manner: "Metaplay can occur only when subjects are not 'in role' whereas play necessitates that subjects be 'in role'" (Williamson & Silvern, 1992, p. 77). Categories classified as metaplay included nonverbal directions (pushing another child into a different position); object ("Pretend this is an ax."); action ("Let's pretend we are crossing the bridge."); story line ("You're supposed to stop her."); assign roles ("You be the troll."); and directing or rebuking ("Go into the house!"). Children who engaged in metaplay and children who scored high in productive language competence also scored high on the comprehension measures leading the researchers to conclude that metaplay and productive language competence are positively correlated with story comprehension. Further analysis revealed that only the directing aspect of metaplay contributed significantly to comprehension.

Pappas (1993) found that kindergartners were just as successful in their pretend readings of informational books as they were in pretend reading of storybooks. In October and then again in January, Pappas held individual sessions with 20 kindergarten children reading them both a storybook and an informational book. After each reading, the children were asked to pretend read the book to the researcher. This process was repeated for three consecutive days with each reading audiotaped. Pappas analyzed the children's abilities to maintain co-referentiality in the storybook (introducing characters and referring to them in a logical manner thereafter with pronouns) and co-classification in the informational book (similarly the introduction of a class of animals or objects and the

future logical reference to those classes). The children improved in both types of retellings over the three sessions and were deemed successful at both types. Before the second and third readings, children were asked to choose which book to use first. When they had done so, the researcher asked if that was their favorite of the two books. Although most had difficulty articulating the reason for their choice, they did indicate that their choice was their favorite book. In both the October and January sessions, more children chose the informational book as their favorite over the storybook. This led Pappas to question the use of primarily storybooks in the kindergarten classroom. She suggested that the results of this study would indicate that children's preferences for informational books and their abilities to pretend read those books should lead to a reevaluation of the assumption that narrative is primary.

Vukelich (1994) investigated the effects of exposure to environmental print and interaction with an adult on kindergarten children's ability to read environmental print in and out of context. Three kindergarten classes in the same school participated in this study. In two classes, five different print-enriched dramatic play areas were set up as centers available during the children's free-choice time of the day. The settings (a post office, a shoe store, a camp site, a veterinarian's office, and a restaurant) were utilized for three weeks each from January to May. In one of the two classrooms, an adult, either the researcher or her assistant, would periodically enter the play area and assume an appropriate role in the play session for a few moments. When the adult would enter the play session, she would make use of the print available in an appropriate manner (e.g., the adult would assume the role of a customer in the shoe store who was looking for the sale

rack and ask if the store accepted MasterCard. There was a "sale" sign on a rack of shoes and a "MasterCard Accepted" sign located on the cash register.) There was no adult interaction in the other print enriched classroom. No additional print was added to the third classroom which served as a control. Children were administered the Concepts About Print test and assessed on their ability to read a set of 10 words selected from the environmental print used in the centers both in context (in the center) and out of context (on a list). All three measures were used as pretest and posttest. Results showed that exposure to environmental print with or without adult interaction enhanced children's ability to read that print in context. Additionally, the group that experienced adult interaction scored significantly better than either of the other two groups, suggesting that enriched print settings can help children learn to associate print with meaning and that ability can be enhanced through appropriate adult intervention.

In a microanalysis of a group of five-year-old Head Start children, Elster (1994) found that the preschoolers attended to print very little in their emergent readings. He found that emergent readings consisted of episodes of interwoven talk strategies and reading strategies. Elster identified five patterns of strategy used by the children: (a) Building momentum. Children often moved to higher levels of emergent reading as they progressed. (b) Intrusion of nonnarrative episodes into narration. Children obviously used illustrations as a source of narrative readings but would often interrupt their narration with nonnarrative speech such as labeling various aspects of the illustrations or commenting on the illustrations. Narratives seemed to depend on the children's memory from prior read aloud sessions rather than attention to print. (c) Attention to predictable

text. Predictable text was more likely to be recounted from memory in the children's readings than nonpredictable text. (d) Attention to print format. Although used infrequently by the children, some attention to print occasionally surfaced in the children's readings. This was primarily seen when the print changed format (e.g., print was incorporated into an illustration). (e) Child-initiated interaction. This pattern was primarily evidenced when the children would engage the researcher in dialogue about an illustration. Elster summarized his findings in this way:

A variety of book, setting, and reader factors provide sources of information for emergent readers and can influence changing reading and talk strategies within an emergent reading. Features of the book being read, including the salience of illustrations, predictable language patterns, and changing print formats, can influence the strategies selected. In addition, readers were able to use an adult listener as a resource, and to build momentum in a reading from dialogue to monologue, and from nonnarrative to narrative language. (p. 413)

Using the same group of Head Start preschoolers, Elster (1995) explored importations of nontext information into the children's emergent readings of three storybooks previously read aloud to them on three different occasions. Importations were defined as "any talk that was not a rendition of the original story content, but which was linked with the meaning or format of the book" (Elster, 1995, p. 70). The children's regular teacher or an assistant read the stories. They were not given any special instructions, and the read aloud sessions were audiotaped and analyzed for importations

during the session. The teachers typically made comments, asked questions of the children, related the text to the children's experiences and background knowledge, and invited them to join in on predictable sections of the text. After the read aloud sessions, each child read the books to a researcher. These emergent readings were audiotaped and analyzed for importations. The four types of importations and the percentage of each to the total number of importations were: (a) importations from illustrations (51%); (b) importations from background knowledge (46%); (c) importations from read-aloud sessions (22%); and (d) importations from other texts (9%). Some importations were classified in more than one category resulting in percentages exceeding 100%. An additional finding of this study was that the children who came closest to reproducing the original texts were the same children who incorporated the greatest number of importations. Therefore, the use of importations did not seem to be an indicator of immature emergent reading. Elster deduced, "Importations reveal the information sources readers orchestrate during the reading process" (p.82).

In summary, just how young children learn to read is, in essence, still a mystery. The reading act is so complex that researchers tend to focus on minute details attempting to understand at least a fragment of the whole. Even with such focused investigation, however, there is still disagreement and confusion. Note how one study seems to promote reading environmental print as more indicative of early reading success than letter naming ability (McGee & Lomax, 1988), while another seems to view reading environmental print as insignificant when compared to letter-naming ability (Masonheimer, et al., 1984).

Some studies seem to support emergent literacy (Barnhart, 1991; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Durkin, 1966; Eller, Pappas, & Brown, 1988; Elster, 1994, 1995; Feitelson, et.al., 1993; Lomax & McGee, 1987; Martinez & Roser, 1985; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991; Shinn-Stricker, House, & Klink, 1989; Vukelich, 1994) while others support reading readiness ideas (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Davidson & Jenkins, 1994; Ehri & Wilce, 1987; Masonheimer, Drum, & Ehri, 1984; Meyer, et.al., 1994; Peterson & Haines, 1992; Stahl & Murray, 1994). The unfortunate consequence of such disparity in the literature may be an explanation for why teachers seemed uninformed about current research findings. Troyer and Yopp (1990), as mentioned in the introduction to this study, identified the problem as a "lack of timely dissemination of research information to teachers" (p.39). Perhaps it is not "timely dissemination" that ought to concern researchers as much as the relevancy of research for teachers. Reports of research are available to teachers through professional journals, inservice training, and college courses. Perhaps the problem is that conflicting reports leave teachers confused or cynical.

WRITING

Traditionally, teachers have waited until children knew how to read before asking them to write any type of composition. Reading was seen as a prerequisite for writing. The emergent literacy perspective views reading and writing as parallel processes which develop concurrently and in a pattern unique to each child. However, several researchers have identified behaviors commonly seen in young children's earliest writings.

From her observations of young children, Clay (1975) identified several "principles" in early writing attempts. Illustrative of these are the recurring principle and the generating principle. The recurring principle states that children tend to experiment in their writing, using the same letters repeatedly to construct a long message. Similarly, the generating principle states that a child who knows a few letters will vary the position of those letters to construct a variety of "words."

Clay found that initially children believed print was for labeling objects. After some time, they began to understand that print had meaning. At this point, some children would construct what they hoped to be a message and ask an adult to read it to them. Graves (1983) found that 90% of beginning kindergarten students believed they could write, but only 15% said they could read.

Just as with reading, emergent literacy maintains that children begin to learn writing concepts long before they are taught to write in school. Bissex (1980) observed the writing behaviors of her son Paul for a five-year period beginning when he was five years old. At age five, Paul had not received any formal instruction but exhibited an understanding that writing was for communication. For example, one day he wrote this message to his preoccupied mother: RUDF (Are you deaf?) (Bissex, 1980, p.6). At the beginning of the study, Paul already appreciated the functional nature of writing which he showed by using a variety of forms including lists, letters, newspapers, and signs.

Dyson (1982) examined children's literacy behavior in a kindergarten writing center. She observed children using writing for such purposes as labeling people and objects and writing stories and "letters" to each other. These behaviors led her to

conclude that young children seem to possess an operational definition of the mechanics and purpose of writing.

Graves (1983) found that much of young children's writing was "egocentric play produced for their own consumption" (p. 164). He also found that speech played an integral part in their writing. They sometimes spoke 20 times as much as they wrote. As children became more concerned with the conventional aspects of writing, their production slowed. At this point, children often relied on a pivotal phrase such as "this is..." for an extended length of time. Their concern with correctness limited their expression. Graves found that children could compose messages once they were familiar with six consonants. Many used the letters in their first names. Graves stated that after four years of data collection, the most important finding was: "Writing is a highly idiosyncratic process that varies from day to day" (p. 270).

In a 1985 study, Dyson established a writing center in a kindergarten classroom and observed children's writing behaviors. She chose five children for case studies, three of which are targeted in this particular review. The three children, Tracy, Rachel, and Vivi, appeared to be at similar levels in writing ability. Closer investigation revealed, however, that while they all demonstrated an awareness of the graphic aspects of print and used writing initially to label, they displayed different ways to approach writing and had different intentions. Tracy enjoyed labeling persons and objects while Rachel wrote to communicate a message. Vivi, on the other hand, was most interested in how the system worked. Dyson ascertains that these findings illustrate that "learning to write, as learning

other symbolic systems, involves a unique child coming to understand a distinctive system, within the particular contexts of his or her life" (p. 121).

Ferreiro (1986) used a Piagetian-based theoretical approach to examine the writing development of two young children over a two-year period. She used conflict resolution as well as the notions of assimilation and accommodation to explain the changes in the children's writing development. The children seemed to look at the information available to them and take that which made sense to them, formulate hypotheses, and use them to explain their writing until they encountered examples that did not fit their "rules," thus creating disequilibrium. Ferreiro speculates that this construction of literacy knowledge is different for each child, so therefore development cannot be described as the succession of stages.

Sulzby (1986) focused on the writings of three kindergarten children based on a shared experience--a race with erratic wind-up toys. The children were asked to make up a story about the race for someone who was not there at the time. First, they were asked to tell the story to the researcher, then they dictated their story to the researcher, and finally, they were asked to write the story themselves. The children exhibited a variety of behaviors, including two girls who gauged their speech to fit the speed of the scribe's writing and one child who told the story as if it happened to an anonymous child. Based on these behaviors, Sulzby concluded that children are cognizant of many characteristics of reading and writing long before they receive formal instruction.

Ehri and Wilce (1987) taught one group of kindergartners how to use their knowledge of letter sounds to spell phonetically while another group practiced matching

letters to isolated sounds. They then tested the two groups to determine which group could better read a set of nonsense words that adhered to the spelling patterns taught. Ten out of 12 children in the spelling-trained group read the selected words better than the control group children who had not been taught to spell. Two children were dropped from the latter group because they displayed "substantial spelling competence, equal to that of the experimental subjects on the posttest" (Ehri & Wilce, 1987, p.54). The researchers determined that the children used phonetic cue reading, a method of storing letter-sound associations in memory for later retrieval, rather than a sounding-out method to spell the words correctly. Ehri and Wilce concluded that their results support the notion that teaching children to spell phonetically enhanced word reading skills in beginning readers by helping the readers store words in memory.

Dobson (1989) studied the reading and writing behaviors of a group of inner city resource students, several of whom were learning English as a second language, from the beginning of kindergarten until the end of first grade. Children were asked to draw a picture, write about the picture, and subsequently read what they had written. They were also asked to choose a book to read from a preselected group of three storybooks.

Although Dobson maintains that the children's progress was continuous rather than stagelike, he identified five levels of understanding in the children's writing and reading strategies. These range from Level 1, in which children demonstrate understanding that books have meaning and can be read, to Level 5, in which they indicate understanding that morphemes have constant spellings and can be combined to form new words. Dobson found that the children tried print-related strategies in their writing and in the reading of

that writing prior to applying those same strategies to the print in storybooks. He also found that the children initially developed composing strategies in the context of their attempts to read the storybooks rather than in their writing. Dobson concluded that his research supported the interrelatedness and parallel development of reading and writing.

Sulzby, Teale, and Kamberelis (1989) found that children's writing takes many forms. At age two, many children scribble. By age three, letterlike features can be seen in their drawings. Some three-year-olds even produce nonphonetic letter strings. Between ages four and six, most children begin using invented spelling in their writings which gradually gives way to conventional spelling as they increase their awareness of orthography. Kindergarten children vacillate between the various forms.

Fox and Saracho (1990) examined the written language acquisition of seven preschool children ages 3-5 years. The children were asked to participate in two tasks: (a) distinguishing between illustrations and print and (b) writing "hat, pig, nut, and mop." All of the children were able to make the distinction between print and pictures; however, one three-year-old boy still drew pictures rather than writing when asked to represent the four words. The authors concluded that this may indicate that the "distinctions between pictures and written words may be a two-step process in which recognition precedes production" (p. 83).

Jensen (1990) asked 16 four- and five-year-old preschoolers to complete four writing tasks (a story drawing-writing task, a story writing task for a wordless picture book, a letter writing task, and an emergent writing vocabulary inventory) to examine their responses to the different types of writing tasks. She specifically looked at the way in

which the children organized their writing under the varying conditions. Aspects of organization that were examined included how the children structured the page (e.g., left-right directionality, top-bottom directionality, inventory format) and number of letters used. Johnson concluded that children demonstrated knowledge about a variety of forms and functions of written language.

Fifty kindergarten children were randomly grouped into an experimental and a control group to determine if social interaction would positively affect invented spelling ability (Cannella, 1991). Each group was pretested using the Invented Spelling Test. During the treatment phase, the experimental group was encouraged to work together to decide how to spell needed words on three writing tasks. The control group was instructed to work independently with some teacher modeling on the same tasks. The experimental group showed significant gains on the Invented Spelling Test after only three sessions. The children that showed the most improvement were those that scored low on the pretest. Those that scored at a higher level were not as likely to show improvement. Cannella explained that phenomena by pointing out that letter/sound correspondence as tested on the Invented Spelling Test is not the same as conventional spelling. Children who entered the experiment at a level approaching conventional spelling had already achieved a high level of letter/sound correspondence. She suggested "the children who progressed created the concept through social interaction" (p. 129).

Richgels (1995) used the Ehri and Wilce (1987) study to determine if the same results would be obtained for children who were naturally good invented spellers but had not been trained as invented spellers as in the Ehri and Wilce study. A screening

procedure was used to identify kindergarten children who were proficient in alphabet knowledge but were non-word readers. These children were then classified as good or poor invented spellers. Each group was subjected to a training period to teach them to read phonetically simplified word lists (e.g., TEM for "team"). The children were then tested on their ability to read similarly spelled words. The results of this study support Ehri and Wilce's conclusions that good invented spellers are better word learners than poor invented spellers. Specifically, Richgels concluded that "inventive spellers are especially prepared for the use of phonetic knowledge that beginning word reading requires" (p. 108).

In summary, while general patterns of development can be identified for the acquisition of written language (Dobson, 1989; Sulzby, Teale, & Kamberelis, 1989), each child has his or her own unique pattern of development (Ferreiro, 1986; Graves, 1983). Young children exhibit a great deal of knowledge about the functions and forms of writing, including labeling and writing lists, and about communicating through letters, signs, and stories prior to formal instruction (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1975; Dyson, 1982, 1985; Jensen, 1990; Sulzby, 1986). These studies seem to support the practice of encouraging writing in the kindergarten classroom as a means of promoting both reading and writing development. It may be that having children write serves as a method of validating what they come to school already knowing. If 90% of beginning kindergartners believe they can write (Graves, 1983), but kindergarten teachers show through their methods that they do not believe the children can write, the result may be harmful to children's dispositions to take risks and to their self concepts, both of which are necessary

to becoming competent readers and writers. In light of the Richgels' (1995) study, supporting children's attempts at invented spelling also seems warranted because it appears to assist children in their reading development.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Methodological studies broach a variety of issues related to classroom practice. Among these issues are comparisons of the effectiveness of different approaches to literacy instruction, materials, the role of the teacher/student response.

Comparison of Approaches

Morrow, O'Connor, and Smith (1990) found that the type of reading program in the classroom, literature based as opposed to reading readiness, significantly affected urban, at-risk children's abilities to retell stories, read favorite stories, comprehend text, and identify book concepts (e.g. naming different types of reading materials and naming books they liked). The children in the literature-based classes scored significantly better in all areas and were also more likely to report that they read at home. There were no statistical differences between the two groups on traditional measures of reading readiness skills. The authors suggest that these results may support a blending of approaches for maximum effect.

Stewart (1992) examined the awareness about learning to read both at home and in school of two groups of kindergarten children. The children were from two schools with differing approaches to literacy instruction. One school emphasized decoding and the other took a whole language approach. Stewart found that the children could articulate

how they were learning to read in both settings. Stewart concluded that "instructional setting was a salient feature in that children who received individualized and small-group instruction gave more detailed and comprehensive responses than did the children who received phonics-based instruction: (p. 5).

Meyer, Wardrop, and Hastings (1993) investigated teachers' use of time and teacher-student interactions to determine their effect on kindergartners' reading performance. Classroom observations and students' scores on beginning and ending standardized tests in three different school districts were examined. The most salient predictor of successful reading performance was the level of knowledge of letters and words at the beginning of the year. The second most powerful indicator was the type of instruction received. Results showed that the children who had teachers who allocated the most time to teaching reading, who interacted the most with the children during the reading period, and who provided the most feedback to students responses scored higher on reading performance measures at the end of the year. An ancillary finding in this study was that length of day (full day versus half day) did not have a significant effect on end-of-the-year reading performance.

Ross and Smith (1994) sought to evaluate the Success for All program designed to bring students to grade level in reading by third grade. Elements of the Success for All program include one-on-one tutoring by reading teachers, regrouping across grades into homogeneous reading classes (when deemed desirable for the student), smaller reading classes, family support, and a reading program utilizing both phonics instruction and whole language methods (specifically a systematic reading program integrating storytelling

and retelling and cooperative learning techniques). This study examined the effects of the program on reading skills as tested by individual and standardized group tests. The study also investigated school climate through classroom observations and teacher interviews and surveys. Subjects were kindergarten, first, and second grade students and their teachers in an inner-city school in Memphis, Tennessee, that implemented the Success for All program. The students were matched with students in a control school and scores compared. Overall, no advantages were exhibited by the first and second graders who participated in the Success for All program on the individualized and standardized group tests. However, kindergartners and the lowest quartile of first graders did show significant improvement over the control group. One possible limitation in evaluating the disappointing results for the overall effects was the greater alignment of the conventional curriculum in the control school to the rudiments of the standardized test given in Tennessee. In general, the teachers were pleased with Success for All program but expressed concerns about the perceived lack of preparation for the state mandated test.

Learner interpretations of beginning reading and writing instruction in skills-based and whole language inner-city classrooms was the focus of a cross-curricular comparison study in kindergarten and first grade (Dahl & Freppon, 1995). Eight classrooms were involved in the study: two kindergarten skills-based, two kindergarten whole language, two first grade skills-based, and two first grade whole language. Ethnographies were completed at each site for two years, and then a cross-curricular comparison was made using the data collected. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis was utilized in the comparison. Qualitative comparison revealed five patterns: (a) Most focal learners were

interested in accuracy in both situations. (b) Both groups exhibited growth in phonemic awareness and letter-sound relationships. However, there were differences in application that seem to reflect the writing experiences in the different curriculums. The whole language classrooms engaged in daily writing of stories while the skills-based classrooms primarily completed phonics worksheets. (c) Children in both areas demonstrated enjoyment of literature. However, in the skills-based classrooms, literature was used primarily as a filler when the children completed their assignments and during read aloud sessions conducted by the teachers. In whole language classrooms, trade books were the primary source of reading materials for reading instruction. Teachers read several books each day and the children choose books for independent reading each day. (e) A pervasive finding involved the children's sense of self as reader/writer and persistence to continue reading and writing:

Whole language learners demonstrated in nearly every classroom observation a perception of themselves as readers and writers. Further, these learners sustained their attention in literacy episodes and persisted when engaged in reading/writing tasks. (p.65)

In skills-based classrooms, these patterns of persistence and sense of self were limited to the most proficient readers and writers. Independent reading tended to be brief and children tended to abandon books after just a few pages in these classrooms.

Children were evaluated on a variety of quantitative measures including tests of intentionality, concepts about print, alphabetic principle, story structure, written narrative

register, and concepts of writing. Quantitative analysis revealed that the only significant difference was in written narrative register which favored the whole language learners.

In concluding their cross-curricular comparison, Dahl and Freppon indicated that the differences found in the two situations, skills-based and whole language, could best be summarized by looking at the distinction between literacy skills and literacy behaviors. Literacy skills as revealed by the quantitative analysis were very similar across both groups. However, literacy behaviors (e.g., taking on the task of reading and writing and reflecting on one's own literate activity) were exemplified and promoted more in the whole language classrooms than in the skills-based classrooms. They concluded, "In the final analysis, acquiring the disposition for learning may be the most critical occurrence in the early grades" (Dahl & Freppon, 1995, p. 72).

Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn (1995) used three observation measures, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, the Classroom Practices Inventory, and another instrument developed by the researchers, to rate 18 preschool classrooms and 14 kindergarten classrooms as either didactic or child-centered. Samples of children from each classroom were then tested on a variety of measures to determine achievement and a number of motivational aspects of education. The children in the didactic classrooms scored significantly better on a letter/reading achievement test but not on a numbers achievement test (adapted version of the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement test). Children in the child-centered programs fared significantly better than their counterparts in the didactic classrooms on most of the motivational factors including rating their abilities, expectations for success on academic tasks, dependency on adults for permission and

approval, pride in their own accomplishments, and worry about school. Effects appeared to be the same for economically disadvantaged minority children and middle class children.

In summary, once again support can be found for both approaches to early literacy instruction, sometimes within the same study (Stipek, et.al., 1995). Dahl and Freppon (1995), Morrow, O'Connor, and Smith (1990) and Stewart (1992) found advantages in literature-based and whole language techniques, both of which are closely associated with emergent literacy. The Meyer, Wardrop, and Hastings (1993) study supports a formalized approach to reading instruction at the kindergarten level, an approach certainly contradictory to emergent literacy and questionable even from a reading readiness view.

Materials

Materials vary from one school system to another and even from one classroom to another. However, the most salient materials related to literacy instruction are the basal reading series adopted by most school systems. The use of basal reading series varies in the kindergarten classroom from no reliance whatsoever on these materials, to teachers having teachers' editions available for reference, to the requirement to complete a kindergarten and/or readiness level workbook. These workbooks tend to focus on letter recognition and letter/sound relationships. Additionally, computer materials are increasingly popular in kindergarten classrooms. Computer assisted instruction ranges from game-like formats designed to increase skills such as letter matching and letter/sound relationships to programs such as Writing to Read, which, when used as a complete program, encourages children to use invented spelling to compose stories on the computer.

An earlier study of kindergarten reading instruction, which revealed that all 42 teachers in the study equated reading instruction with phonics and believed phonics instruction to be prerequisite to first grade reading materials, prompted Durkin (1990) to examine six 1989 basal reading series to determine their approach to beginning literacy tasks. Durkin wished to find out if the reading materials took varying abilities into account and if the phonics skills taught at the kindergarten (K) and readiness (R) levels, the levels typically covered in kindergarten, were a prerequisite for the preprimers. Findings suggest that the basal readings series examined promoted whole class instruction with very little provision for individual needs. Additional analysis revealed that the phonics taught at the K level was not related to the skills needed for the preprimers used in first grade.

Hiebert and Papierz (1990) examined the reading instruction in the beginning levels of basal reading series. They found that both groups of basal series, those claiming to be "meaning-oriented" and those identified as decoding-oriented, centered around reading readiness skills rather than emergent literacy skills. As advocates of emergent literacy, Hiebert and Papierz concluded that "kindergarten and readiness books are based on some doubtful assumptions about the ways young children learn and what it means to become literate" (p. 332).

Using artistic criticism, Huenecke (1992) studied the aesthetics of Writing to Read, a computer-based literacy program. The researcher initiated the observation of a group of thirty kindergarten children in April as they began the Writing to Read program. Observations continued through December of their first-grade year when they completed

the program. Two artistic criteria, balance and coherence, were used to analyze the observations of the computer class. Balance, in the form of individuality and opportunity for exploration, existed in the design of the program itself and in the activities provided. However, in an attempt to balance time and equipment, the teacher deterred creativity. Coherence, defined as "unity, cohesion, and consistency" (p. 56), was lacking due to the imposed time constraints and the failure of the teacher to integrate the activities of the computer lab with those in the regular classroom.

Foster, Erickson, Foster, Brinkman, and Torgesen (1994) conducted two studies in order to evaluate DaisyQuest, "a computer program designed to increase phonological awareness in young children" (p. 126). The first experiment was conducted with preschool children and resulted in some programming changes including using digitized speech rather than synthetic speech to facilitate the children's understanding and dividing the program into two segments. The experimental group scored significantly higher on the Phonological Awareness Test and on the Screening Test of Phonological Awareness-Experimental Version (STOPA) than did the control group.

The second experiment involved 70 second semester kindergarten children. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised was administered to the children and the scores used to match pairs. Both the highest and the lowest scores were eliminated from the sample. A pretest-posttest design was utilized involving a computer-based test called Undersea Challenge, the STOPA, the Production Test of Segmenting, and the Production Test of Blending. After daily training sessions for 16 consecutive days, the measures were again administered to the children. The experimental group showed significant gains on all

but the STOPA. The failure to show significant gains on the STOPA was attributed to a ceiling effect due to the high level of phoneme awareness of the group at the outset of the study. The authors determined that both experiments "support the conclusion that phonological awareness in young children can be significantly increased by training with the computer program, DaisyQuest" (p. 134).

In summary, from the two studies on basal reading programs, it seems apparent that publishers of basal reading series have yet to make the transition to an emergent literacy perspective. Given the reliance of many teachers on teachers' manuals for guidance, these materials may be detrimental to the promotion of emergent literacy. The study concerning the DaisyQuest program with its emphasis on phonological awareness without regard to contextualizing language or to comprehension would seem to promote a reading readiness approach as well. The study on Writing to Read seemed to imply that the program used as it was intended had the potential to allow for individual expression thereby contextualizing literacy practice, but due to time constraints and the lack of carry over to the classroom, potential results were not realized. Computer programs such as DaisyQuest and Writing to Read seem to be gaining popularity in kindergarten classrooms. This popularity may be due to a perceived need to familiarize children with computers.

Role of the Teacher/Student Response

The role of the teacher takes various forms ranging from keeping abreast of current best practice, to establishing classroom environment, to assessing student response. Keeping abreast of current best practice may be accomplished through reading

professional journals, attending inservice training, or taking additional college courses. Establishing classroom environment is highly dependent upon the teacher's personal style of teaching; however, it is generally accepted that the environment in an early childhood classroom should be warm and accepting in order to enhance children's self concepts and the willingness to take risks. Teachers assess student response both formally and informally through such measures as standardized testing, informal screening, and observation. Emergent literacy advocates promote teachers becoming "kid watchers" in order to assess children's progress and to assist their continued development.

Dyson (1984) conducted case studies of the in-school writing behaviors of three kindergarten children. The purpose was to examine the relationship between the process of learning to write and the completion of teacher-assigned tasks. Dyson observed the three target children completing several types of writing activities including copying sentences from the board and completing fill-in-the-blank exercises. She discovered that only one of the children was interpreting the tasks in the same manner as the teacher, although at times, each child's completed product appeared to be "correct." They were able to attend to the surface structure of the lesson when they still had no understanding of the deep meaning. Their interpretation of the writing tasks assigned by the teacher was dependent upon their understanding of written language.

In a later study, Dyson (1985) again targeted three children determined to be typical of the other students and observed them for 14 weeks during teacher-initiated beginning literacy activities. Audiotaped recordings were made of the children's talk as they wrote and the written products were analyzed. Through this study, Dyson

questioned traditional activities such as copying text from the board. She determined that a teacher cannot completely control the literacy curriculum because "children interpret school experience in light of their own understanding" (p. 509). More specifically, the study demonstrates the "limitations of copying in helping children become composers" (p. 510).

Morrow (1990) explored the effect of classroom environment on literacy during play. Preschool classes were assigned to one of four groups: (a) one in which thematic play with literacy materials was guided by teachers; (b) one in which thematic play with literacy materials was not guided by teachers; (c) one in which books, pencils and paper were supplied in unthemed dramatic play areas with teacher guidance; and (d) a control group. The children in the experimental groups exhibited more literacy behaviors than those in the control group. Of the three experimental groups, the one utilizing thematic materials with teacher guidance prompted the most literacy behaviors.

Troyer and Yopp (1990) identified as the purpose of their study the desire to learn whether or not kindergarten teachers were familiar with a term they associated with emergent literacy, phonemic awareness. They also wanted to determine if kindergarten teachers viewed it as important in their literacy instruction. Surveys were received from 165 kindergarten teachers. Findings indicated that a majority of the teachers were not familiar with the term and subsequently rated it low among the preselected skills indicated by the authors. Interestingly, the least experienced teachers and those having completed a master's degree were more familiar with both the target term and four other decoy terms. The teachers attributed their level of awareness to graduate courses and inservice training.

Troyer and Yopp felt that the lack of knowledge about the term phonemic awareness pointed to an "ongoing educational problem--the lack of timely dissemination of research information to teachers" (p.39).

Neuman and Fischer (1995) examined the integrated language instruction of 20 kindergarten classrooms. All of the classrooms included in the study utilized a holistic approach to literacy instruction which included integrated language instruction, literature-based teaching, and writing with invented spelling. Integrated language instruction was videotaped and analyzed for task and participation (talk) structures. Task structures were classified as either memory tasks, procedural tasks, comprehension tasks, predictive tasks, creative tasks, or opinion tasks. Neuman and Fischer found that meaning-based activities (e.g., activities involving comprehension, reading to students, drawing pictures, and reading with students) constituted 61% of the literacy activities, while only 17% of the activities were based on skill instruction (e.g., letter names, phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, and spelling). However, when the task categories were applied, 79% were found to be related to recognition of information already presented (memory-30%; procedural-29%; comprehension-20%), whereas only 21% involved generating original thoughts and ideas (creative-14%; predictive-6%; opinion-1%). When analyzing talk structures, it was found that 79% of the instructional time was spent in whole group settings. Most of that time was teacher directed with a small percentage (7%) being student directed indicating that a student was performing a task before the entire class. Teachers also asked for choral response (65%) much more

often than individual response (24%). The authors concluded that their results were both promising and indicative of problems:

Clearly, classrooms using a holistic perspective engaged in more meaning-based tasks than previous studies have reported. (The authors are here referring to drill and skill type activities)...(however) the cognitive demand of many of these meaning-based activities appeared to be relatively low....Tasks that encourage children's curiosity, critical thinking, and creative expression were conspicuously absent in our observations. Further, virtually no attention was given to any individual children. (pp. 333-335)

In summary, these studies support the notion that teachers are perhaps the most powerful influence on their students. As professionals, teachers need to be aware of research and its implications for classroom practice. Teachers also need to be keen observers of their students to avoid the inconsistencies revealed by the Dyson studies.

The research studies reviewed above present a mixed picture of the literacy development of young children. Supporters of both the emergent literacy perspective and the reading readiness perspective can find support for their contentions. Repeated story readings and phoneme segmentation training have both been shown to improve at least some aspect of children's reading and writing performance. What educators take from this perplexing conglomeration of knowledge probably depends on their prior beliefs. Those who have promoted phonics as a method of teaching children to read can find evidence to support their beliefs. Those who maintain that children learn best within the context of

meaningful print can find confirmation for their beliefs as well. Others may take from both perspectives. The goal of this study was to describe the literacy practices of one group of kindergarten teachers and then ask the teachers what influenced that practice. The result of studies such as this give educators insight into what teachers do with the information they possess and an understanding of the sources of that information.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

The study reported here was a naturalistic investigation of literacy instruction in kindergarten classrooms. The goal of this inquiry was to describe and analyze the literacy instruction of a specified group of kindergarten teachers and to discover through interviewing what experiences influence the teachers' approach to literacy instruction. In essence, this is a "snapshot" of each teacher, her classroom, and her perceptions of literacy instruction at one point in time. This study was informed by a symbolic interactionist theoretical viewpoint. Passive participation observation and interviewing were used to gather data. Data analysis began during the data collection phase and continued throughout the writing phase of the dissertation.

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

Description of the Setting

This study was conducted in a small city (population 31,000) in the southeastern United States which will be called Vicksburg. Vicksburg is located in what has historically been a politically and religiously conservative area of the country. Natives of the area jokingly say, "If the Southeast is the Bible Belt of the United States, then Vicksburg is the buckle."

The city's school system consists of five elementary schools (grades K-6), one primary school (grades K-2), one intermediate school (grades 3-6), one middle school, and one high school. There are 16 kindergarten teachers working in the five elementary

schools and one primary school. Four of the six schools serve primarily middle class children; the remaining two schools are located in an economically depressed area of the city. The middle school and high school service the entire city.

Vicksburg is the county seat of Douglas County which has a separate school system servicing the remainder of the county. Residents of the city may choose to attend either school system. Traditionally, the city system has had the benefit of more funding, thereby offering better teacher salaries and a higher per student expenditure. All of the city's elementary schools have received their initial accreditation from the Southern Association of College and Schools within the past 10 years.

In the school year prior to this study, the superintendent retired after more than 20 years in that position, and a new superintendent was hired. At the beginning of the year of the study (1994-1995), the administration underwent restructuring that resulted in the hiring of a new supervisor of instruction for the elementary schools, Elizabeth Mason. Part of the new supervisor's responsibilities was to oversee the kindergarten program. Informally, several teachers expressed mild concern that Ms. Mason had a secondary school, rather than early childhood or elementary school, background. However, without exception, each teacher who commented either formally during the interview or informally during one of our contacts commented that she felt Ms. Mason was willing to work with them and to listen to their concerns. Some even expressed hope that conditions would improve. For example, Tamara Clark made this comment:

In kindergarten we're allowed more freedom. We're allowed to choose our resources and take the best of everything. We are at an

advantage that we have a supervisor now, Elizabeth Mason, who allows us to do those things....

Each kindergarten teacher has an assistant that remains with the class while the children are present (7:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.). After the children leave, the assistants go to other grade levels for the remainder of the day. Teachers have this time each day for planning and parent conferences. The school year is divided into six grading periods of six weeks each. Teachers conference with the parents after the first and fifth grading periods in lieu of a report card.

Selection of Participants

Volunteers were recruited from a pool of all kindergarten teachers employed by Vicksburg City Public School System. Prior to contact with the individual teachers, written approval was obtained from the superintendent of the school system, and verbal approval was obtained from the principals at each of the schools involved in the study. After approval was received from the superintendent and the respective principals, a letter was delivered to each kindergarten teacher explaining the study and requesting participation. Interestingly, three of the six principals asked me to define "literacy instruction." Because of a lack of familiarity with the term, I routinely clarified it as "anything to do with reading and writing" in my initial contacts with the teachers. After the teachers had received my letters requesting their participation, I then visited them in their classrooms during their planning time to answer their questions concerning the study. Twelve of the 16 teachers contacted agreed to participate fully in the study, so a visit was scheduled for an observation followed by an interview. Two additional teachers agreed to

an interview only and appointments were made. Two teachers declined to participate: one due to health problems and one due to having a number of children with behavior problems in her classroom.

A visit consisted of one entire day in each classroom while students were present followed by an interview with the teacher. The kindergarten day began at 8:00 a.m. and concluded at 12:30 p.m. During this time, I took field notes focused on the literacy instruction conducted throughout the day. Since the investigation was centered on the teacher rather than on the students, the actions of the children were only noted as they responded to the teacher's instruction. Children were identified in the field notes as C1, C2, C3, etc. (Child #1, Child #2, Child #3, etc.) or by abbreviations such as "J-" or "--." An exception arose to this notation system, however, as I found that teachers frequently used the children's names as examples in their lessons on letters of the alphabet. In those cases, I wrote the child's first or last name as it was specified by the teacher and replaced it with an appropriate pseudonym in the descriptive classroom narratives and in any later descriptions.

After the children were dismissed, I interviewed the teacher. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour and were audiotaped. An interview schedule was used to guide my questions. The interview was modified for each interview, however, to allow questions concerning the literacy activities observed throughout the day. (See Appendix A for an interview schedule.)

All participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B). One copy remained with the participants as a means of advising them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Teachers chose their own pseudonyms at the time of the interview.

Relationship of Researcher to Participants

The importance of establishing rapport with participants is seen as vital in the literature on qualitative research methodology (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Spradley, 1979). Due to having only one occasion to observe and one interview with each of my participants, establishing rapport was a concern. This concern led me to request participation from the kindergarten teachers of Vicksburg Public School System. As a supervisor of intern teachers for a nearby college, I have had occasion to be an observer in a number of the classrooms prior to this study. While I was not personally acquainted with all of the possible participants, I knew a majority of them through my association with the college.

Two of the participants, Melinda Burton and Rachel Stegall, were former students in my methods classes at the college. The influence this previous association might have on the interpretation of my findings was monitored during the study and is noted throughout this report.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In recent years, the need for naturalistic studies in the classroom has been illuminated. Studies conducted in the classroom without the interference of artificial "treatments" are needed to understand meaning making in the classroom context.

Teaching is more than an adult instructing children. Instruction is more than dispensing knowledge. Knowledge is more than facts from a textbook. Each is embedded in the social context of the classroom. Teaching relies on social interchange, so merely studying methods or procedures employed in a classroom gives an incomplete picture at best, and at worst, a distorted view of classroom practice. Understanding the perceptions of the teachers is essential to understanding their teaching.

Teachers do what they do for many reasons. They base what they do--how they teach--on any number of influences. Furthermore, what each does differs from what another does. A kindergarten classroom in the Southeast United States looks different from a kindergarten class in the Northwest or on the Plains. Class A looks different from Class B even if Class B is across the hall. Each classroom is a unique social context and to understand what happens there, the researcher must enter the social context and attempt to understand it as fully as possible.

In this study, the social context has taken a broader definition than a single classroom. The social context for this study encompassed the kindergarten classrooms of one school system. Although each classroom was unique, there were similarities that were seen between the classrooms and teachers reported similar influences.

As noted above, the primary methods of data collection for this investigation consisted of field notes taken throughout the academic day and audiotaped interviews with each of the teachers. A secondary source of data was archival data including copies of planning materials used by the teachers, report cards, curriculum guides, and other pertinent materials.

Participant Observation

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain the purpose of participant observation as follows:

Through participant observation--through being a part of a social setting--you will learn first-hand how the actions of your others correspond to their words; see patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected, as well as the expected; and develop a quality of trust with your others that motives them to tell you what otherwise they might not. (p. 39)

Denzin (1970) further clarifies this purpose by stating "(t)he observer must to the extent of his abilities, learn to view the world of his subjects from their perspectives" (p.365). The importance of an open frame of mind upon entering a setting is illustrated by Bogdan and Taylor (1975) when they state "(t)o enter a setting with a set of specific hypotheses is to impose preconceptions and perhaps misconceptions on the setting" (p.27).

I found Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) to be particularly helpful in planning the study. I adapted the steps described by Spradley to fit the particulars of my study. First, the full model will be described.

Developmental Research Sequence (DRS)

Spradley (1980) suggests that researchers begin with descriptive observations. He defines such observations as follows:

You will make descriptive observations whenever you look at a social situation and try to record as much as possible. It means approaching

the activity in process without any particular question in mind, but only the general question, "What is going on here?" (p. 73)

After a period of time and several observational periods, Spradley suggests analyzing the data collected in order to identify "domains," or "categories of meaning" (Spradley, 1980, p.88). Identification of these domains will result in focused observations leading the researcher to gather more data to support selected categories, or patterns, that have appeared in the data. This, in effect, serves to limit, or focus, the research. The research then goes through another period of analysis that Spradley labels as taxonomic analysis which is a search for "relationships among the things inside the cultural domains" (p. 112). This analysis results in even more focused observations which Spradley calls selective observations. This step often includes interviews with participants as well as observation. Spradley compares this process to a funnel:

The broad rim of the funnel consists of descriptive observations in which you want to catch everything that goes on....Moving down from the mouth or rim, the funnel narrows sharply. Focused observations require that you narrow the scope of what you are looking for....At the bottom of a funnel there is an extremely narrow, restricted opening. Selective observations represent the smallest focus through which you will make observations (p.128).

Interviewing

Spradley suggests a similar process for ethnographic interviewing, again utilizing the DRS (Spradley, 1979). The three categories of interviews suggested are descriptive

questions, structural questions, and contrast questions. Each type is followed by a period of analysis parallel to the sequence described for participant observation. Descriptive questions are designed to elicit "a large sample of utterances that are expressed in the language used by informants in the cultural scene under investigation" (Spradley, 1979, p.90). Structural questions are used to test the validity of the identified domains. Lastly, as with participant observation, the final category, contrast questions, is designed to unveil relationships among the domains. Spradley cautions that the three levels of questions are not intended to describe mutually exclusive stages, but rather to illuminate the cumulative nature of the process. More specifically, descriptive questions are a part of every interview, but structural questions and contrast questions are based on analysis of those descriptive questions and come later in the process.

Model for the Present Study

Because this study provided for only one observation, one formal interview, and one brief followup visit with each participant, Spradley's sequence in its strictest form did not apply. However, as I observed each participant, I formulated questions to ask in the ensuing interview based on my observations. These questions were modeled after and served the same purpose as Spradley's structural and contrast questions. Further, as domains were identified from field notes and interviews of earlier participants, I asked questions intended to clarify those domains from the remaining participants.

Both the field notes and the audiotapes were transcribed. Teachers received copies of the protocols of their interviews and were given the opportunity to clarify and/or delete any information they wished. They were asked to write any comments they wished

and return the transcripts to me. Field notes of the observations were written as descriptive narratives of the literacy instruction in each classroom. The narratives were delivered to the participants with the request to review and comment upon the accuracy of the interpretation. Both the protocols and the narratives were delivered to the teachers in mid-May along with a letter of instruction. As the packets were delivered to each teacher, they were also given oral instructions concerning providing feedback. After approximately a week, an informal visit was scheduled with teachers for the purpose of retrieving the protocols and narratives which they had reviewed. This visit was to give me the opportunity to ask for clarification on any uncertain definitions and to give the teachers the opportunity to clarify or supply further information. In some cases, the teachers were unavailable for questions (they were making telephone calls or in parent conferences), so they simply handed me the packet which included their marked protocols and narratives or instructed me where to find them.

Unobtrusive Data Collection

Unobtrusive data, sometimes referred to as archival data, is defined as the products of "any measure of observation that directly removes the observer from the set of interactions or events being studied" (Denzin, 1978, p. 256). Examples would include samples of worksheets given to children, samples of children's writings, teachers' planning books, resource guides, and reports cards.

Unobtrusive data collection played a relatively minor role in this study. Duplicated materials, such as worksheets, were in most cases not used more than once or twice per day. Rather than requesting a copy, I wrote descriptions of the worksheets along with

examples from each page in my field notes. The materials in the classroom were noted and experience charts or other group writings displayed in the room were duplicated in my field notes.

Teachers frequently referred to the state curriculum guide for grades kindergarten-eight (the teachers called it the "blue book") and the report card. Copies of both were obtained along with a copy of the Readiness level book, Kites, from the reading series currently under adoption in Vicksburg Public Schools. Two teachers stated that they use this book with a group of children in the last few weeks of school. In one instance, a teacher, Jill Wright, who referred to the Success Reading Program allowed me to borrow the guide for the kindergarten year of that program in order to review the program. In another instance, Stephanie Woods gave me a copy of a duplicated activity she frequently uses with children to teach letter recognition.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Pilot Study Interview

The interview guide was developed and piloted with a kindergarten teacher employed outside the Vicksburg school system the summer prior to the study. The participant in the pilot interview was asked if the questions were clearly stated, if she had any misgivings about being asked to answer any of them, and if she had suggestions for any other questions to help me be more effective in obtaining information. She responded that the questions were clearly stated and that she had no misgivings about answering any of them. She had no suggestions for additional questions.

The pilot interview was transcribed and analyzed to provide feedback on effective probing and give assistance in asking questions clearly and concisely. Because the pilot interview lasted for one and a half hours, the number of questions was reduced in an attempt to keep the interviews to approximately one hour. I felt that teachers would be more likely to agree to participate if I would take less of their planning period.

Gaining Entry

Gaining entry to the kindergarten classrooms entailed obtaining permission from the superintendent of Vicksburg Public Schools and from each building principal. My initial approach to the superintendent was a telephone call to the receptionist in the school system's administration building stating the purpose for my call and requesting an appointment to discuss the study. His private secretary returned my call explaining that due to a pending deadline on the budget, the superintendent was not making any non-urgent appointments for three weeks. He suggested that I write my request in a letter instead. I wrote the letter and delivered it to his office. I returned a few days later and received written approval to approach the elementary principals to request permission to ask kindergarten teachers to participate in the study. I made appointments with each principal and prepared a packet of information to give them which included a copy of the superintendent's permission letter, a copy of the cover letter to the teachers, and a copy of the interview guide. All six principals agreed to allow me to place letters in the kindergarten teachers' school mailboxes. One week later, I returned to request participation from the teachers, answer questions, schedule visits, and ask them to sign an informed consent form.

Classroom Visits

Classroom visits began in late February 1995 and continued through early May of the same year. Over the three month period, 12 individual classroom visits were made. In each case, an interview was conducted with the teacher in the classroom after the children were dismissed. Two additional teachers, Karen Anderson and Monique Walker, consented to an interview but did not consent to an observation of their classrooms.

Because I was not actively involved in the classroom setting, I assumed the role of passive participant observer. I made every attempt to not interfere in any way with the normal routine of the classroom. Spradley (1980) suggests that "(a)bout all you need to do is find an 'observation post' from which to observe and record what goes on" (p. 59). In each classroom, I was offered a "post" to the side or to the rear of the classroom. In several cases, this was the teacher's desk. I was allowed freedom to move as the children moved. When they went to group time, I followed but stayed to the rear. When they went to centers, I was free to move about the room observing and taking notes.

On several occasions, I was drawn briefly into an active role. Every teacher introduced me to the class at some point during the day. Twice, in two different classrooms, a child approached me while I was writing down titles of books in the library center during center time. Both times, the child asked me what I was writing. One boy even insisted on writing a title of a class made book in my notebook for me. Only once did a child approach me for help. This child was attempting to spell "lemon" and wanted to know if "LOEX" was the correct way to spell it. In four classrooms, teachers encouraged a child who had written a story or journal entry to show me his or her writing.

In Melinda Burton's classroom, a child suddenly got severe stomach cramps, so I offered to finish making "telephones" with one group of children while she went to the office to telephone the parents.

Analysis

As explained earlier, analysis begins on an informal basis almost as soon as data collection begins and is a recursive rather than linear process (Hatch, 1995). As each participant was observed and interviewed, possible relationships would become apparent. As this occurred, they would be noted, and I would continue to watch for the behavior or question the perception behind those relationships in an attempt to learn as much as possible. For example: From the earlier interviews, it became apparent that it was a common practice for teachers to spend three to five days on activities designed to teach the recognition and sound of each letter of the alphabet. Typically, teachers spoke of "the letter of the week." The predominance of this curricular construct became increasingly clearer as the observations and interviews continued. To confirm my observations, in a later interview, I asked the teacher if the alphabet "drove" her planning during the first part of the year (in essence the first 26 weeks). She responded that it did. In still a later interview, I asked the teacher if the letters of the alphabet were an "organizational tool" for her planning.

Upon the return of the protocols and narratives from the participants, each piece of data was examined for changes made by the teachers. Five teachers made no changes to either document. Of the remaining nine participants, most of the changes were attempts to "polish" responses made during the interviews. Most of the teachers verbally proclaimed

dismay at seeing the transcript of our conversation. I received several comments such as: "Surely I don't say 'and' that much!" "I'm so embarrassed! I feel sorry for my poor children now that I know what they have to listen to all the time." "Why didn't you just slap me for talking like that?!" I reassured each one that conversation typically looks unpolished when transcribed. In two cases, teachers asked to delete brief comments they had made. Only two teachers suggested changes on the narratives. In both cases, the change was actually a further clarification of print available in the classroom rather than any change to the description of their instruction.

Using the same copy of the protocols and narratives the teachers had reviewed, literacy activities and influences on planning were indexed in the margins. During and after this process, relationships were noted on a separate sheet of paper. Approximately 95-100 such relationships were identified. Those relationships were grouped according to "literacy instruction" and "influences on planning" to coincide with my two research questions. A web was constructed for each of the two categories in an attempt to schematically organize the relationships (see Appendix C). From the webs, I devised a tentative outline for reporting the findings. The two sections of this outline served as taxonomies of the two focal points of the study: literacy instruction and influences on literacy instruction. This outline was revised a number of times as further relationships became clear and analysis continued.

Analysis worksheets were designed to assist in organizing and analyzing the data from the protocols and the classroom narratives. Each relationship was written across the top of a worksheet, and the teachers' names were written down the left side of the page.

Before writing each section, I would return to the data and, using the analysis worksheets, record every example of the relationships pertinent to that portion of the report. Using the analysis worksheets, I would then organize and write the findings for that section. This process was repeated for each section of the report.

Descriptions of the teachers were written near the beginning of the analysis phase. These which included age range, years of experience, prior teaching experiences, and a quote from each teacher which was designed to reveal her philosophy of teaching or an issue of importance to her. The purpose of these descriptions was to introduce the teachers and to give some indication of the teacher's theoretical perspective, specifically if they tended to lean more toward an emergent literacy or a reading readiness perspective. As data analysis and the reporting continued, it became evident that further information was needed to define as clearly as possible the teachers' perspectives on literacy instruction. Because whole language is the approach most commonly used by emergent literacy advocates, is seen as the most recent "trend" in literacy instruction, and is indicative of the paradigm shift toward emergent literacy, the descriptions were modified to reflect each teacher's comments on the topic of whole language.

The final step in the data analysis was to return to the review of literature in an effort to triangulate findings concerning relationships found in the observations, in the interviews, and in the literature. A number of such relationships were established and are reported in the conclusion to the study.

According to Hatch (1985):

A naturalistic research approach requires that the investigator enter

the perceptual world of the social actors being studied. Understanding the meanings generated and shared in that world is the goal of naturalistic inquiry. (p.7)

The goal of this study was to enter the perceptual worlds of a specified group of kindergarten teachers and attempt to understand the meanings of literacy instruction within those worlds. The means of doing so was the use of naturalistic inquiry, utilizing primarily the methods of observation and interviewing. Data analysis began during the data collection phase and continued throughout the writing of the report. Findings are reported in the following chapters.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN KINDERGARTEN

Two research questions guided this study: (a) What are the literacy practices of kindergarten teachers? and (b) What influences the literacy instruction of kindergarten teachers? The findings are reported in two chapters with one chapter targeted to each question. Chapter IV describes the literacy practices observed in each of 12 classrooms. Findings were drawn primarily from the descriptive classroom narratives; however, additional information in the form of comments by the teachers during the interviews was included when pertinent to the discussion. Because Karen Anderson and Monique Walker agreed only to an interview, any information about their classrooms comes from interviews rather than observations of their classrooms.

It is important for the reader to become acquainted with each teacher at the outset. Having some sense of each teacher's background experience, length of experience teaching kindergarten, and personal belief system concerning literacy instruction is necessary to interpreting the findings as they unfold. For this reason, descriptions of the teachers constitute the opening section of the findings.

DESCRIPTIONS OF TEACHERS

Descriptions of each of the participants comprise this section of the findings. Included in the descriptions are age range, the number of years experience in kindergarten teaching, and any teaching experiences other than kindergarten. The teachers ranged in age from approximately 25-60. The years experience ranged from three to 27 years. A

few had taught only kindergarten, and several had a wide variety of teaching experiences. Thirteen of the fourteen teachers were white; one was African American. Because all of the teachers in this study were female, feminine pronouns will be used throughout the reporting.

In the descriptions, I have included a quote from each interview that gives a sense of that teacher's philosophy of teaching kindergarten or of an issue of importance to them. Also included is an excerpt of what each teacher had to say about whole language. The rationale behind including the teachers' perceptions of whole language is drawn from the fact that whole language is the approach to literacy most often associated with the emergent literacy perspective. Therefore, the teachers' thoughts on the topic of whole language help determine the teachers' perspectives on the issue of reading readiness versus emergent literacy. Although I did not specifically ask teachers for their perspectives about whole language, most of them brought the topic into the conversation. This is logical because at the time of this writing, whole language is the most current "hot" topic associated with literacy instruction. The descriptions of teachers are arranged in alphabetical order by teachers' last names. In all cases, the names are pseudonyms.

Candace Adams

Candace Adams is 25-35 years old and has taught kindergarten for seven years in three different schools. Her only other teaching experience was one year with a first/second grade split classroom. About herself Ms. Adams said,

(I change) every year, because I get very bored doing the very same thing...People say (to me), "I passed by the school and you were there

until five or six o'clock. What are you doing everyday until five or six o'clock?...I think we are both (referring to Tamara Clark) trying to be progressive, and we are both working for new ways to do new things.

About whole language, Ms. Adams said:

Kathy Watson, Tamara Clark and I have been trying to do a lot more whole language....You do whole language in kindergarten basically anyway; but I think it is just a little bitty, tiny piece of the puzzle. I am still working on that. Whole language isn't something that you wave your hand and do overnight. It is something you are constantly working on....A lot of people would say whole language is having print up in your room and things like that. Whole language is a whole lot more than that. I think everybody probably has their own definition for whole language. You can't really get anybody to put it down in a little bitty sentence or in a little box.

Karen Anderson

Karen Anderson teaches in an economically deprived area of Vicksburg. She has taught kindergarten for 17 years and is 40-45 years old. Prior experiences include four years in first grade and one year in second grade. She taught summer school math for fifth and sixth grade. A significant portion of Ms. Anderson's interview was devoted to expressing regret about how much teaching kindergarten had changed in the past 17 years:

When I started in kindergarten years ago, it was so developmental.

You know, it was really geared to working with the child to develop

them for first grade. And now, what I am teaching I used to teach in first grade...It upsets me to no end. I just (believe) the kids are not ready for some of the things we are expecting them to do...A lot of the fun learning is gone.

About teaching methodologies (whole language in particular), she said:

I don't think you can be totally whole language. You've got to have a mixed bag of tricks, because one thing is not going to work for all your kids. So, we try to do as multi-diverse approach to everything as we can...With the language--reading--they need phonics. I'm big on phonics. I realize not every child is going to learn phonetically; but I'd like them to try, you know, because it opens so many doors if they can. And the auditory discrimination and visual discrimination skills (are) needed to decode when they go to first grade....I think whole language started phasing out for us, in kindergarten, when the computers came.

Ms. Anderson is one of the two teachers who consented to an interview but did not allow me to observe her classroom; therefore, the source of any statements about her literacy practice is the interview rather than field notes.

Melinda Burton

Melinda Burton is 25-30 and has been teaching for three years. All three years have been in kindergarten in an economically deprived area of the city. About teaching kindergarten, Melinda said:

I like the freedom to choose and pick, because when we do that, we are doing...what we like to (do) and what we (have) found the children enjoy. And if you enjoy it, they are going to enjoy it, too....I don't think a whole lot of seat work (should be required in kindergarten)....I don't think that sitting at a desk long periods of time at this age is appropriate. I think they need all the social skills and the hands on things that they can get, things that they can get a hold of....I may be more lenient than others, I believe in the free play--the choose and explore....

Although Ms. Burton mentioned reading theme-related books in as many lessons as she could, she only mentioned whole language once. It was in reference to literature:

I use it (literature) like whole language....

Melinda Burton was my student during her undergraduate work, and I was her supervisor during her kindergarten student teaching experience.

Tamara Clark

Tamara Clark taught third grade for four years before transferring to her present location to take a kindergarten position one year prior to this study. She is 25-35 years old, and she specifically mentioned her philosophy on a number of occasions during her interview:

But as far as philosophy and those kinds of things, they stem strictly from Piaget...because I feel like he is just really grounded. He is really where kindergarten is. He knows; and if you go back and if you look at what we expect kids to do, it does not fit the Piaget model. It

doesn't. And our blue book needs to be revamped and (made to) fit.

We are making kids do things that they are not ready to do developmentally.

It is not that they don't want to, it is not that we can't...that we're not teaching them correctly, it is not that we're not doing a good job, it has been that...this curriculum...(has been) moved down, and it needs to be put back up to where developmentally it needs to be...It just doesn't fit.

Concerning literacy instruction and classroom environment, she explained:

But, as far as my philosophy, I just feel like that the more that we expose children to print and immerse them in rich literature, and give them a purpose for learning, and make it meaningful in their environment...I feel like there is a real natural ability there to learn.

I do believe that. I try to model that for them. I try to use a lot of enthusiasm and praise....Our classroom environment...is very positive....

About whole language, Ms. Clark said:

One of my goals (has been) to become a whole language teacher and to incorporate those strategies in my classroom...and, it is a long process. It is a very long process,...so I am slowly moving that way.

I will never be at the extreme. It doesn't fit with my philosophy. It also doesn't fit with my personality. (The) extreme is when somebody comes in and just says, "Well, kids, what do you want to do today? That's just not my style....I find myself anywhere from the middle to...

I am branching more. Being in kindergarten is forcing me to go even more towards the whole language than third grade. We had the basals that we had to contend with in third grade.

Lisa Cook

Lisa Cook is 50-60 years old and a career kindergarten teacher. She has taught kindergarten in Vicksburg for 27 years. The first three years were in a private, church-related kindergarten, and the last 24 have been in the public school system. Ms. Cook indicated that she has become satisfied with the methods she has developed over the years. Some of the comments she made throughout the interview that substantiate her feelings are as follows:

I've always believed in phonics. I've always tried to have a strong phonics program....It's great to have all this new stuff, but it's also good to stay true to how you feel about things....I'm not sure I want to get into whole language in the other direction (away from direct instruction on letter recognition) because I feel what I'm doing is working....

About the kindergarten experience and especially about teaching reading in kindergarten:

There are some teachers who feel they've failed if their kindergartners aren't reading. I don't think it's the time for that yet. Now, if they can read, wonderful. Go ahead, read. But I do want them to feel comfortable with what they're doing with all their material, so that as they get older and they mature--their little minds mature--they can grasp it and not

be so frightened. I want it to be a time of fun learning and not a fear of learning.

Carrie Dotson

Carrie Dotson has had a variety of experiences. She taught physical education for five years before taking a staff development position funded by Title I. After a year in the staff development position, she returned to college to become certified in kindergarten and was subsequently hired as one of four teachers in a kindergarten center that was part of the Vicksburg public school system at that time. After being out of the public schools for 10 years to stay home with her children, she returned to kindergarten and has been in that position for nine years. For four of the 10 years she was out of the public schools, she taught in a preschool. Ms. Dotson is 40-50 years old.

On several occasions throughout the interview, Ms. Dotson expressed a desire to continue to learn new teaching techniques:

See, that's what I miss being in the classroom....I don't think they (administrators) give us a chance to see somebody else's classroom and visit...because, you know, I want to learn, too. And you get stuck here....sometimes I feel like I'm just staying (the same). If I have student teachers or somebody come in, I love for them to do new and different things....They (usually) want to do what I'm doing and I'm (feel) like, "No! Try something else."

Ms. Dotson spoke of whole language at several points throughout the interview:

I know whole language--you know that's the biggie right now--I do

some whole language things, but I'm not a whole language classroom....

It's like I'm talking way out here, and I might not know what I'm talking about. Way back when I first started, we did experience charts, so I do a lot of experience charts, which has to do a little bit with whole language....It probably makes me more aware of what else I can do with books. You know, what else can we do with it when I'm reading a story?...Next week, we'll write a letter to Mrs. Jones' class about the gerbil. Does that have anything to do with whole language? Yes and no. I guess it's more from the old...from what we called experience charts. I probably still do more of that than I do what you would probably think of as whole language

Sarah Harper

Concerning her wide variety of experiences, Sarah Harper described herself as "real flexible." Sarah, who is 40-50 years old, taught kindergarten for four years when she first began teaching in 1973. She has a master's degree in language arts education so many of her experiences have been as the language arts instructor in compartmentalized elementary schools and junior high schools. She also taught self-contained sixth, third, and second grades before returning to kindergarten in 1993.

Ms. Harper was very straightforward concerning her beliefs about the kindergarten experience:

I feel like kindergarten kids need to be challenged. Not necessarily pushed to the point where they are going to cry and become frustrated,

but if they are ready to read, I feel like that's my job as a classroom teacher, is to encourage them to read. I need to work their little minds, as I call it, to see how much is up there....I see...where they need to understand what school's all about. And to me, a child...at this age is eager to learn. You cannot put too much in their heads.

Later she explained her thoughts on how to help her children be successful:

Well, school is more than just play. They have to learn that...there is a time to do math, there is time to do reading. As they get older, there will be a time to do science and social studies and all. But...there are responsibilities and you try to teach them to understand the responsibility of time limits...like this morning when I did their language, and I gave them like twenty minutes...you have to get them to work within that period of time.

When I asked about her earlier statement, "I'm not your typical kindergarten teacher," she replied:

(chuckle) By that I mean that I am not your...I'm your paper and pencil type teacher. Not total, but I do a lot of paper and pencil type activities. And that's just to get them ready for first grade. When they have the big math workbooks, or they see nine reading dittos on their desks...so that it does not floor them...

Ms. Harper did not mention whole language at all during her interview. With a bit of prodding, she did show me a set of charts she had used earlier in the year and a sample of one child's dictated writing.

Leah McIntire

Leah McIntire, who is 50-60 years old, came to be a kindergarten teacher through a series of happenstance occurrences. She had been working as a medial assistant in a doctor's office for nine years when a friend convinced her to take a job teaching a five-year-old Head Start class. Though she had a degree in elementary education, Ms. McIntire said, "There was nothing about the job that appealed to me except the hours." Later, the county in which she lived was opening a new kindergarten in the fall and could not find a teacher. Even though she was not certified to teach kindergarten, the superintendent asked her to take the position because of her experience in Head Start. She taught three years before going back to school to get her certification. She has now been in kindergarten for 20 years with only two brief interludes: one year as a fifth grade teacher and one year as a parent supervisor for Chapter I. About teaching, Mrs. McIntire said:

I think that you can teach or you can't teach. I think there is an element there in a person that you can't teach but maybe you (can) develop, expound upon somehow....And I think it is either for early childhood, young grades, or older children, too. I think that there are personalities that are suited for one area....I think you have an innate sense of how to do this kind of thing....

About her philosophy of early childhood education, she explained:

I think what you have to do, particularly with early childhood, is establish your philosophy--where you are coming from, what (the children) need.

And I am firmly convinced it better be developmentally appropriate. I think that there is no other way to teach. It is like trying to potty-train a one-year-old. You can't do it, and you can't teach children more than they can take in or with methods that they cannot accept....Piaget and the early childhood people, I think were right on the money, and I still think they are. I go back and re-read. And I'm not so sure that we're putting the emphasis where it should be in the way we teach children.

My philosophy is that we have to get down on their level; it has to be motivational; that children learn through play; through making choices; that play is their work; that--all those old childhood clichés, but I think they still hold true. That children need guidelines, but they also need freedom to make some decisions for themselves. They need choices.

They need ways to do things and then to be given the freedom to succeed or fall on their noses sometimes and learn that way. I think that they still learn experientially, with hands-on type activities. That they need a variety of things. They need loud time, quiet time. You have to mix it up. You have to be accessible to them. I don't think they want to sit and listen to you all the time. I think they want to learn for themselves, and you are there to sort of guide that. There is a lot about Montessori that I like

because I think that they have to experiment and feel their way through things. I don't think that all children learn the same way. I think we have to make available lots of materials, different varieties of materials. And they still need guidelines....I think that it should be literature based. I think that it should be print rich. It should be...(I) love the whole language stuff....

Julie Shelton

Julie Shelton is 40-50 years old and has been teaching kindergarten for 19 years. She taught third grade for one year and remedial reading for two and a half years. The following quote taken from her interview seems to indicate, along with several references about the children "not reading yet" and "not knowing" what printed words are, that she adheres more closely to a reading readiness than to an emergent literacy philosophy. However, in the following interchange, she appears to be interested in whole language:

We did patterning the other day; I wrote "patterns" (on the chalkboard). We did ordinals; I wrote "ordinal." I know they don't know what that is. But (I write the words on the board) just to introduce it and say what we talked about....I guess I've always done that. We visited a kindergarten in Lincoln that was all day (an all day program)....They did a lot of whole language, which I'm not that familiar with. I want to get more familiar with it. But where they wrote the stories and (said), "This is the little word 'the.' Do you see the word 'the'? Circle 'the.'"" And I thought, now that's neat, just to get them to recognize short words. That will help

them so much more when they do start to learn to read....

Rachel Stegall

Rachel Stegall is 30-40 years old and has been teaching for three years. She taught third grade for one year and has been in kindergarten since that time. Ms. Stegall commented about the move to kindergarten:

But (whole language) looked so much more fun to me that when I started teaching third grade, I tried to incorporate some of that. But (I) found that there were so many requirements that I had to use certain books that I really couldn't do like I wanted to do ...because of the way it was set up. So, I felt much more freedom...which kindergarten was my first love anyway. I was very fortunate when the first year after I began teaching, a kindergarten position came open at the end of the year. I put in for it and got it....That's was one of the main reasons (the chance to use whole language techniques) that I wanted kindergarten; not only did I enjoy that age level, but I just saw all kinds of opportunities to implement the things that I had really wanted to do.

Rachel Stegall was my student during her undergraduate work. I was her supervisor during student teaching.

Monique Walker

Monique Walker is 40-50 years old and has taught kindergarten for 12 years. Before coming to kindergarten, she taught third grade and first grade. For two years, when the enrollment at her school was not sufficient to have two kindergarten classes, she

taught a readiness class which is a transitional class between kindergarten and first grade.

Ms. Walker teaches at a school that piloted whole language for one year in 1989-1990.

With the advent of Writing to Read which Title I moneys purchased for her classroom, she now views her whole language teaching time as the "good old days." In her interview she described writing activities that she had done with her classes in the past, adding:

Of course, now, when are doing Writing to Read, we don't have time to do the things like that, that we would like to do. (chuckle) Okay?... I mean if I had to choose, I would lose the Writing to Read...and go back to the things (we used to do). Because you don't have the time to do the developmental things that we should be doing. You know, used to, we could take time and show them how to build a house and help them do more things with manners.... There are just so many things that we don't have time to do now, because we feel like we have to do this.

Ms. Walker is one of the two teachers who consented to an interview but did not allow me to observe her classroom; therefore, the source of any generalizations about her literacy practice is the interview rather than field notes.

Kathy Watson

Kathy Watson has moved several times due to her husband's occupation, so she has had a variety of teaching experiences. She is 40-50 years old and has taught for 21 years. Her experiences range from kindergarten to fifth grade to resource classes to junior

high math to adult education. But, "My favorite grade is kindergarten," she reported. Ms. Watson was the only participant to label herself as a whole language teacher.

Ms. Watson talked about her "conversion" to whole language:

I have been doing whole language for about seven, excuse me, about eight years....When I came to my former school, it was a phonics-based program, and they were doing Open Court. We were concerned as a faculty that comprehension was not really being addressed...so, our supervisor talked to the superintendent and a lot of wheels got to turning, and we decided that we were going to move into another direction....We started to read all we could on whole language and found New Zealand was using whole language. (The school system) had enough money to hire a consultant to work with us....We went through a very intense workshop that tore everything up that we had always thought that children learn...what's best for children. But it was a real good evaluation for us. And I know I have changed my way of doing things because of going through this process. It was very painful. Very painful...I feel that I am a better teacher because I went through it. I know in my heart and in just seeing the children and what they are doing that whole language is the way to go. And I could get on my bandbox (chuckle) because I have seen so much (benefit) from it.

Stephanie Woods

Stephanie Woods is a young teacher (20-30 years old) who has been teaching kindergarten for three years. Prior to teaching kindergarten, she was a kindergarten assistant in the same room she now has as her classroom. She was also an interventionist which is a special education teacher who works with special needs children in their regular classroom. Although she stated a preference for literature-based instruction ("I just like to basically use the book as much as I can to teach a skill."), her goals seem to conform more to the reading readiness perspective:

Basically, (I want children) to recognize their alphabet and the sounds associated with each letter. How to form all the letters, even if they're not...if it's a squiggly S, as long as they know it's a curve. I want them to enjoy being read to. To be able to listen and sit down and tell you what happens. To write their (first) name and last name, as well as copy... in the writing center, because they're going to be doing a lot of that when they go to first grade. To know their numbers, and how to count, as well as get along with each other because I have a lot of tattletales in here and basically for this group to get along and stop tattling....Basically, I strive for the alphabet recognition and the sounds, because I feel like that's important. If they don't know all their alphabet, they're going to have some trouble. I'm a firm believer in that and that's basically it.

Jill Wright

During her 25 years of teaching kindergarten, Jill Wright has had several unique experiences. First, she had the opportunity to set up two different kindergarten programs, one state funded and one federally funded through Title I. When she first began teaching, certification for kindergarten was not a requirement. She taught one year in a private, church related kindergarten and then began teaching in the public system. After having taught for several years, she was asked by a nearby college to assist them in establishing a certification program for kindergarten teachers. About her philosophy, Ms. Wright said:

And I still believe--maybe that's my philosophy--I believe that there's no one way that works best for all children. I think you have to try a variety of methods. When something doesn't work, then you need to find something else....And then in recent years, I really like the whole language program--not that I am a purist--but I do use a lot of it, and have discovered that a lot of kindergarten teachers are already doing the type of things a whole language program promotes. We just didn't have the labels. But, I do like the fun part about it. And that is that children really respond to it nicely. With phonics, it's a necessary thing, but it is not too fun (laughter). So, I feel like if you have a combination of methods, then you're going to hit the majority of the children.

The teachers in this study were a complex group. Kathy Watson was the only teacher to apply the label of "whole language teacher" to herself. Others felt they were in the process of becoming whole language teachers, and still others said they used some

whole language techniques, but none of them, except Ms. Watson, felt comfortable labeling herself as a whole language teacher.

On the other hand, there were some who indicated that they were not whole language teachers. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker indicated that whole language was a program that got shoved out of the curriculum when they received the Writing to Read program on the computers, so they no longer counted themselves as whole language teachers. Lisa Cook indicated that she did not foresee moving toward a whole language approach because she was comfortable with what she had done in the past and felt that she was getting good results. Sarah Harper did not mention whole language. Julie Shelton stated that she did not know much about it. Melinda Burton and Stephanie Woods, both relatively inexperienced teachers, talked about literature-based integrated curriculum, but had little to say about whole language.

Although Kenneth Goodman (1986) maintains that whole language is a philosophy rather than a methodology, several of these teachers made reference to "doing" whole language, indicating that they saw it as a methodology. Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, and Jill Wright all talked about moving toward whole language or "doing" things like charts, big books, and writing with invented spelling. Carrie Dotson also said that she "did" some whole language things.

Leah McIntire is an example of someone who embraces the emergent literacy philosophy but doesn't "do" many of the techniques associated with whole language. She stated that she finds big books awkward, she rarely rereads a book, and she never

indicated that she looked for anything in the books she read aloud to her students except enjoyment and relationship to the current theme.

Using a dichotomous classification scheme with "reading readiness" on one side and "emergent literacy/whole language" on the other proved to be futile with this group of teachers. Even though several teachers apparently did not see themselves as whole language teachers or even try to "do" whole language, some of the activities I observed in their classrooms (or witnessed the products of) were congruous with the philosophy. Sarah Harper took dictation from her children at least once, Lisa Cook used experience charts, and Julie Shelton liked the idea of teaching words in the context of a chart or a story. It would seem then that all of these teachers were at some point on a continuum stretching from emergent literacy on the left to reading readiness on the right. As findings based on the observations of literacy instruction and on interviews with the teachers are discussed, the notion of a continuum rather than a dichotomy is strengthened.

LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN KINDERGARTEN

Literacy instruction played a vital role in all the classrooms observed. That role took on different characteristics, however. In some classrooms, there was a certain portion of the schedule devoted to literacy instruction, another portion to mathematics, another to centers, and so on. The time allotted to literacy instruction varied from one whole group instruction period to several whole group lessons on literacy related topics. In these classrooms, it was typical for one or more centers to include literacy activities on an individual or small group basis. In other classrooms, literacy instruction literally

permeated the entire day. While whole group instructional periods were still evident and a portion of center activity was specifically allocated to literacy activities, these teachers seemed to look for opportunities throughout the day to bring literacy skills into focus within the context of the natural occurrences in the classroom.

This chapter explores findings based on the first question guiding this research: What are the literacy practices of kindergarten teachers? The second research question (What influences teachers' planning for literacy instruction?) will be addressed in Chapter V. While this study is primarily descriptive in nature, some analysis and interpretation is warranted in order to gain perspective on literacy instruction by this group of kindergarten teachers. Excerpts from the descriptive classroom narratives play a vital role in the reporting of the findings concerning literacy instruction in kindergarten. Such excerpts are used throughout this report and are distinguished by italics.

Literacy instruction includes both reading related topics and topics dealing with writing, so the remainder of this chapter is divided accordingly. I have attempted to describe both planned and incidental literacy events in the classroom. As is advocated with a holistic perspective, reading and writing often overlap and rely one upon the other. In as much as possible, in describing such events, the reading portion of the activity will be described in the first section with reference to a follow-up writing component. Then in the writing section, the reading component will be reviewed briefly and the writing portion described in detail.

Reading Instruction

Not so many years ago, early childhood educators would have balked if the term "reading instruction" were applied to the kindergarten experience, believing that five-year-old children were not developmentally ready for reading instruction. They preferred the term "reading readiness" or "prereading" to describe the activities commonly found in the kindergarten classroom. These activities included letter recognition, letter/sound relationships, word relationships, visual and auditory discrimination, and spatial relationship exercises. A story reading time was also common to these classrooms. Stories were read to children for enjoyment, to familiarize them with books, and to promote a love for reading later in life. In the extreme, teachers did not expect that children could read, and therefore, did not attempt to teach them to recognize any words. Variations of this perspective still exist in some kindergarten programs.

A different perspective on literacy instruction, a holistic view often labeled "whole language," is also found in kindergarten classrooms. In a few classrooms, the holistic perspective is taken to the extreme in that the entire school day is devoted to literacy instruction. Other academic areas are utilized merely as subject matter for reading and writing. In an informal interview, Kathy Watson indicated that she had been trained in whole language by a consultant from New Zealand. Her summation of that training was:

Everything in the classroom revolves around literacy. She told us to ask ourselves if what we were planning to do promoted literacy; and if the answer was "No," then we shouldn't do it. We decided after the training was over, that the difference between the two countries is that

in the United States, we try to educate the whole child. In New Zealand, they are only concerned with literacy development.

This statement exemplifies the extreme of the holistic perspective. Most of the classrooms in this study fell somewhere between the two extremes described.

In reviewing the classroom descriptions and the protocols, I found a number of categories of reading related activities. This section is devoted to identifying and describing those activities which include: letter recognition and letter/sound relationships, read aloud sessions, a group of activities I have labeled "classroom print," and skills instruction. The term "classroom print" includes not only a description of the richness of the print environment but also events that involve children in decoding unfamiliar print other than that found in literature.

Letter Recognition and Letter/Sound Relationships

Activities to promote letter recognition and letter/sound relationships were the predominant literacy related activities reported by teachers in this study. Teachers indicated that they usually planned to spend anywhere from two days to a week on a particular letter. Several stated that they would sometimes extend the time period to two weeks if the children seemed to be having difficulty learning the new letter and its sound. Typically, teachers organized their instruction around a "letter of the week" and used a variety of materials to assist children in becoming proficient at identifying letters and their sounds. One of the most consistently used materials was the AlphaTime program.

AlphaTime

AlphaTime, a commercial program intended to introduce the letters of the alphabet and their sounds through the use of inflatable "letter people," was utilized to varying degrees in 13 of the 14 classrooms involved in this study. Following are some of the comments about the use of AlphaTime:

Leah McIntire:

I have a specific time spot for AlphaTime, about 15 to 20 minutes a day. We come to a large group area. I will say to the children, "We have a new letter friend." They really get excited. And the letter friends live over--away from us (waving her hand to indicate "far away"). And, they are put away. And so, they wait and I go get him. And there's quite a lot of excitement about introducing him. I bring him to the front of the group and see if anyone knows his name. There's a song that goes with him. So we always play his letter song. There are words in the song that start with his sound, so they know to listen for those, and pick out what is special about him. Now, each (letter person) will have a dilemma, a problem, something that happened to them. I might read a storybook about that letter friend. There may be a filmstrip. There may be a sequential story that we cut apart and put back together. There are other skill components that go with them. There are no particular number of days for us to work with it. One letter friend may take

three days, one may take a whole week....The vowels are girls. The consonants are boys.

It is interesting to note how the teachers seemed to accept the inflatables as they perceived the children did. Ms. McIntire referred to them as "our letter friends." When I asked Monique Walker to choose a "favorite letter" and tell me all the activities that she would use to teach it, she immediately spoke of the letter as a letter person from AlphaTime:

OK. So, let's see who do I want. Oh, I just love them all. (chuckle)

They have such good personalities. (laughter)....

Ms. Walker and Ms. Anderson were the only two teachers who indicated that they used the AlphaTime program planning manual to a great extent. Most of the other teachers indicated that they have modified the program to suit their styles and to include what they feel the children enjoy. Following are comments by two teachers that indicate the manner in which they have adapted the program:

Rachel Stegall

I don't like it (referring to AlphaTime). Because, I think the stories that go along with it are so far fetched and so unmeaningful. Now, I think it's a cute idea to have the little blow up people and the letters and have the attributes on there. And I'll probably still use that, but as far as their stories that go along with it...I'd rather do like I did today. (That is) say, "Mr. J told me that he has a story (that) he'd really like for us to read." You know, and

teach the letters through that. And still use his jumbled junk (Mr. J's attribute)...as the beginning (of my letter instruction).

I: Right. I noticed that at a center...they can make something out of junk.

So, you know that's just...things like that I don't mind using.

But I do not like it. For one thing. It does not teach the alphabet in order. I think that is confusing, because they have to know how to alphabetize very early. And (with AlphaTime) you start with the letter M....And I just think ...if I use it next year, I'll start with (Aa) and go right through.

Jill Wright

We have always used the AlphaTime people in the order that they were given in the teacher's manual. We sat down one day and we said, "This is silly. Why don't we do the letter that goes with whatever theme we are doing? If it is Valentines Day, let's do V. Let's not do P or Q."

So, we tried it this year, and we like it really well. So, it's a good way, and we have come up with something for almost every letter. We even had to go to the "United States of America" (as a theme) in February for U. (chuckle). But, it has worked out a lot better....

Several teachers indicated that they use the AlphaTime inflatables and play the accompanying song to introduce a new letter because the children enjoy them. Sending home a duplicated picture of the new letter person was a popular technique for informing

the parents about the new letter person they were learning. On several occasions, teachers would use the letter person's attribute as a mnemonic device for helping a child recall the sound of a letter. For example, as her children finished a worksheet requiring them to find all the y's among several rows of words, Carrie Dotson would check their papers and ask them for the sound of "y." If they had difficulty remembering, she prompted them by asking, "What does Mr. Y do all day?" When they answered "yawn," she would repeat the word emphasizing the /y/ and ask them again for the sound of "y."

Kathy Watson was the only teacher who did not use the AlphaTime program at all. When asked about it, she replied, "I only use whole language....I don't use any phonics based program." She had the following to say about her alternative approach to teaching the alphabet.

I: I wanted to ask you how you teach them (your students) to recognize the letters of the alphabet, or do you feel like that is necessary?

KW: Okay. I teach all the letters of the alphabet every time I open a big book and read. I mean, we are constantly pulling out letters. For example, at the beginning of the year we talked about bears and we looked at b-e-a-r....So, really the alphabet is introduced as a whole. Now, because parents just feel very strongly that they need to focus on a letter, in my letter to parents I (state a letter focus for the week). And, therefore, they know we are really focusing on words that have this /b/-sound, the letter "b."

And, I also do teach structured writing, because even though I am modeling writing and most of them are picking it up by just watching me, I do want to show them correctly how to form those. So, once a week, for fifteen minutes and usually it is at the beginning of the week, I teach them the formal way of writing. And then they just go back to their seats, get their journals....But as far as the alphabet, I teach the alphabet in its whole.

In summary, all but one teacher used the AlphaTime program which was available in each classroom. Many teachers indicated that they modified the program to suit their needs. Several only used the inflatable and the song to introduce the letter; these tended to be the teachers interested in the whole language approach. Several others read aloud the storybooks centered around each letter person and then placed them on the classroom bookshelf. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker used many of the components of the program. Both identified it as a "whole language program" indicating that it included literature (the books about the letter people), and it integrated different subject areas.

Additional Alphabet Activities

Once the letter was introduced with AlphaTime, the teachers followed with a variety of activities. Most teachers appeared to have established a routine for activities associated with each letter. Jill Wright describes her procedure:

Generally I do the same thing with every letter. And, we present one letter per week....Then, I'm using the Moncure Books this year. They

also give a whole story about a letter and show things that this child puts in a box that begin with the letter we are studying. So it really gives the children many examples. Also, I have a picture file that has really good pictures that begin with that letter....And, then I ask the children to think about something that they can draw or something that they can cut out from a magazine that begins with the assigned letter. That is their homework. They are to bring it the next day. We put it up on our homework board and talk about it all week. When they present their homework, they do just like the leader did. They hold their picture where no one can see it and then we guess what their picture is. So, that makes it fun for them....We also have all kinds of worksheets that we can do with the letter...but usually the only sheet that I send home, is the sheet that has a big picture of the letter person on it so that the parents are aware of what the homework is that they need to find and bring back on Tuesday. Sometimes, I will send home, especially after Christmas, a sheet that has a story that involves a letter person. It might be like, "Danny duck drinks...." But those are on a little ditto sheet, and the children go through and they circle all the D's. I don't do this until after Christmas because even though it is written on a primary typewriter, I still feel like it is kind of hard for little eyes to adjust to that....So, those are probably the only two worksheets I use.

Most teachers used at least one worksheet at some point. The most frequently used type was one that required the children to mark pictures beginning with the letter sound. Several of the teachers referred to these as "sound sheets." Another type of worksheet, the type described above, required them to circle all the "m's, r's," etc. on a page filled with words. Some teachers cut words from magazines and then duplicated a page for each child. Others wrote the words and included first and last names of the children.

Like Jill Wright, other teachers asked children to bring in an object, a picture cut from a magazine, or a picture that they drew that began with the letter they were studying. They referred to this as the children's "homework." Similarly, letter boxes or letter bags were used in several classrooms. Typically, one child was given a box or bag labeled with the current letter under study to take home and fill with as many objects as they could gather. When the child brought the letter box (or bag) to school, they were allowed to stand before the class and give clues about the various objects. On the day I observed Rachel Stegall's class, a child named Tyler had brought in the "W bag." Ms. Stegall held the bag on her lap while Tyler stood beside her. She asked the class to make the /w/ sound and reminded them to make their guesses start with that sound. Tyler would point to an object still inside the bag and give clues with Ms. Stegall prompting as needed. Children would raise their hands if they believed they knew what the object was and Tyler would call on them. If they were correct, the object would be removed from the bag and shown to the class. When the children guessed incorrectly, Ms. Stegall responded either

with "that's a good guess" (if the guess started with "w") or "Let's see, /w/ /w/ /w/. Does (word that did not start with 'w') start with that sound?"

Letter recognition and letter/sound relationship instruction that I observed also included asking children to spell a word as the teachers wrote it on the board. This word was usually either a child's name who had been chosen to be the leader of the day or a topic about which they were talking. Several classrooms used the Animal Island series of four spiral bound big books. The first two books introduce children to the letters of the alphabet through a tape recorded story about a group of animals who set sail for Letter Island discovering letters along their journey. The letters are presented in alphabetical order which does not correspond to the AlphaTime series. Therefore, several of the teachers indicated that they used Animal Island for enjoyment and as a review after completing the AlphaTime program. The latter two books in the series introduce letter sounds and such print conventions as capitalization of names.

Several classrooms included letter recognition, letter matching (capitals and lowercase letters), and alphabetical order games in their centers or what three teachers (Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, and Kathy Watson) called "tubbing." Candace Adams described tubbing as being "like centers (except) you are picking it (the tub) up and sitting it down on the tables."

To assist children not only with recognition but with letter formation, several teachers had students practice forming the letters on the chalkboard, with "magic fingers" in the air, on each others' backs, with finger-paint, in salt trays (plastic plates with a thin layer of salt on the bottom), and in dollops of shaving cream squirted on their tables. As

stated earlier, Kathy Watson reported that she planned a 15 minute writing lesson each week on her focus letter of the week.

Several teachers reported that they did cooking activities for various letters (e.g., making muffins for /m/). Sarah Harper asked parents to provide treats for the children to eat that started with each letter.

Brainstorming a list of words beginning with the focal letter was an activity used in several classrooms along with art/craft projects and finding the letter in the children's names, in books, and on charts of songs and poems. Typically in the case of finding letters in print, the children would use a pointer or a "mask" to isolate the letter. Masks are posterboard "frames" with a handle. Candace Adams had her children use "spy glasses" (their own hands cupped as if they were using binoculars) to look for letters. I also observed her playing Hangman with her children using the word "Monday." She clued them that it was a day of the week and wrote the vowels across the top of the hangman's "stand." This activity served to reinforce letter recognition, letter sounds, familiar words, and the concept of vowels and consonants.

Several teachers had developed activities unique to their classrooms. Stephanie Woods had a set of small mirrors that she distributed to the children in order for them to see how they formed the sounds with their mouths. Lisa Cook had collected several sets of objects or pictures beginning with various letters such as a bucket of keys for /k/ and a set of pictures of dogs for /d/. She used these collections to encourage oral language development in that she had each child select one and then stand before the class and make up a story about it. She encouraged the children to begin their stories with "Once upon a

time..." and conclude with "The End." As a review activity, Carrie Dotson brought out the AlphaTime inflatables and the class would pretend they were going on a trip with certain ones. The children were to state an item that they would take on the trip that began with the same letter as their letter person. Julie Shelton utilized a phonics program entitled "The Talking Alphabet" which had children hold a laminated card of pictures and directed them through a recording to point to the pictures that began with a particular letter. Candace Adams reported that she occasionally had a "special day" for certain letters. For example, during "t" week the class had "Tacky Tie" day. She also related the following "special day" suggested by a student:

Last year one which I did--this is really bizarre--when I did U, we had already done Q; and I told them how Q and U always stayed together. And one of them said, "Well, they should get married." So we had a mock wedding. We had cake, punch, and everything.... We had a bride and groom and flower girls and all that stuff. All the parents came, grandparents. And we married Q and U, so they would always be together until the end of time.

Because my observations were conducted later in the year, many of the teachers had already covered all the letters of the alphabet, so I was unable to actually observe many of the activities the teachers described to me in the interviews. One thing that I did observe in almost all of the classrooms was the teacher reinforcing letter sounds throughout the day in every aspect of the curriculum. For example, when Carrie Dotson took her children to the cafeteria for lunch, she commented, "Oh, look, everyone, we are

studying 'y' and we are having yogurt for lunch today!" When Leah McIntire took her class to the gym to play with the parachute, she called children to run underneath according to the first letter in their names. Teachers who had writing activities planned or who had children writing in journals assisted children in spelling words by stretching the sounds for them or in some cases isolating a sound for them. These teachers seemed to have more opportunity to reinforce letter identification and letter sounds than did teachers who did not have children writing.

Finally, one of the things that it is possible to say about everyone was that everyone put up an alphabet chart. Most were located in the usual position above the chalkboard. Kathy Watson's, however, was below the chalkboard, as she explained, "at eye level to the children."

In summary, for approximately the first twenty-six weeks of each school year "the alphabet rules," as Julie Shelton put it, in the kindergarten classroom. Instruction revolved around teaching the letters of the alphabet and their sounds. Ability to identify letters and their sounds was listed as a goal by most of the teachers in this study.

Typically, each letter was isolated and taught one at a time without regard for any other area of the curriculum. Some teachers, again those who expressed an interest in whole language, introduced the letter(s) that corresponded with the units they were teaching in an attempt to be more holistic. They then would reinforce the letters through the charts and big books they were using, asking children to point out the letters in the context of a piece of literature. Lisa Cook's approach was somewhat the opposite; instead

of choosing the letters to correspond with the units she was planning, she planned "a zillion" activities around each letter.

Isolating letters and their sounds is seen as a reading readiness practice which is part of the behavioristic notion of segmenting adult knowledge into skills and subskills and sequencing them according to difficulty. The reading readiness perspective maintains that teaching children letter names and sounds prepares them for the next "level" which is blending sounds to make words.

Read-Aloud Sessions

No matter what their theoretical perspective, reading children's books is a highly favored activity of early childhood educators. Readiness advocates believe it helps children increase their attention span and promotes a love of books and reading. They present reading books as an activity that children themselves will soon be able to accomplish. While emergent literacy advocates present a wide variety of children's literature, they are likely to utilize books with predictable language and/or story patterns. They are more likely to read the same book repeatedly and also more likely to make that book available to the children and to encourage them to begin reading it for themselves.

Large charts are also common to both types of classrooms. Kindergarten teachers have traditionally written poems and songs on poster-sized charts and asked the children to follow along as they read or sang. However, teachers with a holistic perspective are more likely to use that chart for teaching skills such as letter recognition and decoding and mechanics such as punctuation and capitalization.

Although read-aloud sessions for books and charts are similar, they will be dealt with in separate sections in an effort to distinguish the particular nuances of each type of activity.

Books

In all the classrooms I observed, reading books aloud was a daily occurrence. As I interviewed Carrie Dotson, she suddenly realized that she had failed to read a book to the children that day (although she had read a narrative poem). Her response was "I was thinking...I usually read a book every day. I didn't read a book today...It's like you feel guilty. You've got to have a story every day!" Leah McIntire reported that she had not missed a day reading to her students in 22 years. Reading books aloud to children was viewed as important to this group of teachers.

Procedure

The general procedure employed by the teachers in this group was rather consistent. Teachers would hold up a book and announce that they had a new book to share. They would then read the title by either reading the words or saying "The title of this book is...." On one occasion in Tamara Clark's room, she held up the book, and before she said anything, the children spontaneously began to decode the title, The Little Yellow Chicken. The group managed to decipher the entire title with no prompting from their teacher.

At this point most of the teachers gave the author's name. A few gave the illustrator's name. Stephanie Woods explained,

...I like for the children to recognize that I didn't just make up this story.

I want them to know what an author is and (that the book) has his name on it....I think one child thought the author could be the illustrator, too.

He had that thinking that whoever wrote it, drew the pictures. We talked about that some....

Candace Adams, Rachel Stegall, Kathy Watson, Stephanie Woods, and Jill Wright discussed the cover with the children. Tamara Clark used the title page for the same purpose. Several asked the children to predict what the book would be about. For example, Candace Adams introduced Patrick's Dinosaur, by Carol Carrick, and said, "Look at Patrick on the front cover. What do you think is going to happen? Maybe if I show you the back, too. You want to see the back?"

All of the teachers held the book out to the side to enable the children to see the illustrations as they read. They read expressively, typically pausing occasionally to ask a question, make a comment, clarify an illustration, or define a word. The following example from Jill Wright's reading of Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs by Judith Barrett illustrates these behaviors.

Ms. Wright held up the book, Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs and read the title pointing out that "meatballs" is a compound word.

"Look at that! There is a compound word." Holding her hand over one part of the word and then the other, she explained, "This is 'meat.'

This is 'balls.' Put them together....Have you ever heard this book?"

The children responded that they had not. "Oh, it's one of my favorites!"

She discussed the front and back covers of the book with the children.

Ms. Wright then read the book, occasionally asking questions such as: "Would you like that? (food coming from the sky)....Think about that. We would just have to keep our plates right here (indicating in front of her) and run outside when we saw it (the food)...."

This example also illustrates the enthusiasm many teachers modeled for children about books ("Oh, it's one of my favorites!"). Candace Adams spoke about modeling enthusiasm and excitement in her interview.

And like I told you, I just bought that book last week. And I had really planned to do something with frogs this week. But I told (my assistant) when I got that book about Dinosaur Toes...I said, "Oh, forget it! I am doing dinosaurs." You know, I was excited about it...and I think they pick up (on it) if they know you really like something. Then they get excited about it, too.

Several teachers attempted to relate the book they were reading to the children's lives. When a child brought in The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Dream by Stan and Jan Berenstain for show and tell, Julie Shelton asked the children to raise their hands if they had ever had a bad dream. After reading a book entitled, I Like to be Little by Charlotte Zolotow, Leah McIntire asked the children to share what they enjoyed doing that the little girl in the story liked to do.

Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, and Jill Wright tracked the print in the books they read either with their hands or with a pointer. Rachel Stegall stated in her interview that she tracked print in big books. She had read a smaller book to her class that day.

After reading the book, teachers typically asked more questions. Several teachers returned to the text immediately for various purposes. Melinda Burton turned back to the beginning of the big book she was reading and said, "Let's go back and find the rhyming words." After reading The Chick and the Duckling by Mirra Ginsburg, Julie Shelton wrote the words "Me, too" on the chalkboard and then returned to the book, reviewing what the duckling said each time and asking the children to respond like the chick did with the words "Me, too." She would point to the words on the chalkboard as the children responded. At the end, she added the words, "Not me" because the chick finally decided to not do what the duckling was about to do.

Candace Adams held the book, Dinosaur Toes by Joy Cowley, and played the recording of the text for the second time that day as a method of drawing the children away from cleaning up their centers and back to the group area. Tamara Clark returned to The Little Yellow Chick, by Brian Cutting and Jillian Cutting, after the children returned from lunch for a drama activity. (The complete description of this activity is included in the final chapter of this report.)

Candace Adams, Melinda Burton, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, Monique Walker, Kathy Watson, and Jill Wright indicated in their interviews that they utilize repeated readings, returning to a book on another day and sometimes spending as long as a week on a book. Speaking of The Little Red Hen, Monique Walker said,

(We spend) at least a week or two, you know, just on that one story, because they love hearing the same story again and again.... You wouldn't think they would do good, they'd get tired of it, but they don't, they

love it....

Stephanie Woods indicated a different perspective on repeated readings of the same book. She and Leah McIntire indicated they did not typically read the same book again, but did on occasion, if requested by the children.

(I read books) one time--unless the children say, "Read this again."

And I'll read it again. Most of the time, if I read it again, they'll say,

"We've heard this...We've heard this one, Teacher. We want to hear

something else." Unless there's (a reason)....If I read a teddy bear book

about hibernation (earlier in the year), I'll do it again in the winter.

Sarah Harper indicated that she did not read books more than once. Typically, in the mornings after the children completed a worksheet of some sort, the next item on the agenda was to read a big book to the children before her whole group language lesson. She would allow the leader for the day to pick a big book for her to read. After she read it, she would then ask the leader to return it to the library immediately to make it available for other teachers. When asked her purpose for beginning the day with a book, she stated, "Just to get them calmed down."

Another behavior observed during read aloud sessions in several rooms was teachers pausing to allow children to supply the predictable language. In some cases, it was only once in the story. In Jill Wright's reading of Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs, she asked the children to supply the words "The end" at the conclusion of the book. Sarah Harper paused at the end of More Spaghetti I Say! and asked, "And the bowl is what?" The children said, "Empty." In reading I Like to be Little, Leah McIntire paused at one

point as she read "...but right now I like to be..." and motioned for a child to supply the word "little."

In other classrooms, the children took a more active role in supplying words or phrases when the teacher paused or joining in on reading certain predictable portions. In Tamara Clark's class, the children had joined in on the repetitive refrain on the first reading earlier in the day even though it was the first time they had heard the book. Candace Adams' children joined in lustily with the recording of Dinosaur Toes as she tracked the print in the book. Rachel Stegall paused to allow the children to use the illustrations to decide just what the jigaree was doing on each page. The repetitive refrain from the book, The Jigaree, by Joy Cowley is:

(The jigaree was) _____ here.

(action word)

_____ there.
(action word)

Jigarees _____ everywhere.
(action word)

Melinda Burton stopped often during the reading of two separate rhyming big books to allow the children to supply the rhyming word.

Two teachers, Rachel Stegall and Stephanie Woods, reported that they sometimes read to small groups during center time. Several teachers reported that they allow the children to choose books for read aloud at least once a day. In Monique Walker's room, the tray on the chalkboard was lined with books. At one point in the interview, she

motioned to it and said, "That is my waiting list." The children placed the books on the tray that they wanted her to read aloud.

Lisa Cook did not read aloud to her children the day I observed. Instead, a group of "Read to Me friends" came into the classroom for 15 minutes and read to the children. The Read to Me friends were fourth graders that come and read a picture storybook to the kindergartners once a month. At the designated time, the Read to Me friends arrived with books in hand. The older children approached the younger ones, and they went to find a place to read or simply stayed at the table. Girls were paired with girls and boys with boys. In some cases, two pairs shared the same area making four to a group. When the older children finished reading the book they brought, they selected another book from the classroom shelf. In the pair closest to where I was sitting, the kindergarten child read a section from a book about dinosaurs to the older child.

In summary, read aloud sessions were a "given" in the classrooms involved in this study. Elster (1995) found that during read aloud sessions, teachers typically made comments, asked questions of the children, related the text to children's experiences and background knowledge, and invited them to join in on predictable sections of the text. This pattern held true for virtually all the teachers in this study. However, the degree to which teachers invited the children to "join in on predictable sections of the text" varied according to the book being read. Several teachers, Sarah Harper, Leah McIntire, and Jill Wright, only paused once to invite children to supply a predictable word or phrase. In two of the three instances, it was at the very end of the story. Other teachers allowed children a more active role by choosing books with a great deal of predictable language.

In Candace Adams, Tamara Clark's, and Rachel Stegall's classrooms, the children were involved throughout the story. Placing children in the role of active learners to increase learning is consistent with the findings of Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) and recommended by Anderson and colleagues (1985).

Another practice exhibited by some of the teachers during read-aloud sessions and supported by research is repeated readings of storybooks. Repeated readings are associated with better comprehension, increased ability to infer conclusions, familiarity with story structure, and increased vocabulary (Martinez and Roser, 1985; Feitelson, et al., 1993). Candace Adams, Melinda Burton, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, Monique Walker, Kathy Watson, and Jill Wright indicated that they utilized repeated readings in their classrooms.

Certain other behaviors have come to be associated with the emergent literacy/whole language approach including setting a purpose for reading by asking children to predict what the story will be about by looking at the cover, modeling directionality by tracking print as it is read, and gaining an understanding of authorship by including the author's and illustrator's names as part of the introduction to a book. Teachers exhibiting all these behaviors were Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, and Jill Wright.

Reinforcing Skills

As seen in the descriptions of read aloud sessions, teachers used the sessions to reinforce reading skills such as rhyming words, vocabulary building, and comprehension. Most teachers asked comprehension questions throughout the readings. Others asked them at the end of the book. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker reported that the

kindergarten children in their school participated in the Accelerated Reader program. The Accelerated Reader program, which emphasizes comprehension, was described by Monique Walker in her interview:

I: You said that (referring to the book I Was Walking Down the Road, by Sarah E. Barchas) is an Accelerated Reader book. So how does that tie in?

MW: Okay...today after I read the story the first time...we tested them on it to get their points....

I: Do you call every child over one at a time?

MW: Right.

I: And you read the questions, they tell you (the answer), and you cue in the answer?

MW: Right....The whole (program) is to encourage children to enjoy reading and to get them to really read. But in kindergarten we do it just to help with their comprehension....We figure if they have to listen enough to answer some questions, then they'll really try to figure out what is going on. And it really does help comprehension.

I: So, did you get them all tested today?

MW: Right. Oh, it takes maybe thirty minutes. It is usually just five questions for each story, and they earn points....A lot of places don't even do kindergarten....We said, "We don't want to be

left out. We want to be involved." Because we get left out of
so many things...

Julie Shelton described an activity that she had devised for assessing comprehension of
read aloud books:

I did something else this year, too, for the first time, and I like it. So
far, I've just done Pinocchio and The Little Engine. And it is stories
they have heard before and I made up questions to go with it. I take
them out in the hall...where they can't see each other and ask them (for
example) "Who did Pinocchio live with?" and "Who turned Pinocchio
into a little boy?" I think that is good for listening comprehension....

Teachers would also incidentally reinforce sound symbol relationships during read
aloud sessions. Kathy Watson had pointed out the relationship between rhyming words
ending with -ad to her class earlier. As she was reading a book later in the day, she came
across the word "sad" in the text. She said, "Oh, my goodness, I hear the word 'sad.' I'll
bet you can help me spell the word 'sad.' /s/-/a/-/d/." She wrote the word on the marker
board and pointed to it each time it appeared in the story, pausing to allow the children to
fill in the word "sad." After she finished reading the book, she said, "Boys and girls, we
are going to add the word 'sad' to our word box." In the interview, Ms. Watson explained
the purpose of the word box.

In here (the word box) are all the words that we have pulled from
stories or the children have brought up....Once every two weeks, I'll
go through and just pick up all these words, and we'll flash them in

front of them, and they'll read them. At least every other day, or every day if I can, I like to pick a word out, and what I want to do is make new words....But, we just keep adding these words. This is like our little vocabulary (file)....This is part of a center, and they can do whatever they want to with the words.

Punctuation, especially periods, question marks, exclamation points, and quotation marks (which the teachers referred to as "talking marks"), was reinforced in several classrooms through the use of read aloud books. Jill Wright placed the big book What Will the Weather Be Like Today? on a stand, tracked the words of the title as she read them, and asked while pointing to the question mark, "What is this?" Later, in the same reading, she pointed to an exclamation point and asked, "What does that mean?...How do we say it (indicating how should they read the sentence)?" The children loudly responded, "Loudly!"

Four teachers reinforced the concept of reality versus fantasy by asking the children if the story could really happen. Candace Adams asked about Patrick's Dinosaurs, "Is his imagination on overtime?!....Do you think Patrick had a really good imagination?" Through this, she helped the children to understand that the events in the book were fantasy. Julie Shelton asked, "Can a frog really write?...No, it's make believe, isn't it?"

Teachers reinforced a variety of other skills through their read aloud sessions. Kathy Watson stated that she taught letter recognition and letter sounds through the use of read alouds, especially big books. Candace Adams and Tamara Clark made use of

"masks," small hand held posterboard frames with a handle, to allow the children to practice identifying letters and then words. Julie Shelton stated that her purposes for the lesson revolving around The Chick and the Duckling were to give the children a feeling of "I can read" and to help them begin to recognize small words. Melinda Burton used two big books to introduce the concept of "question words" to her students. Several teachers used informational books as read aloud books to assist their students in answering questions about the topic or to verify predictions they had made about a topic. Karen Anderson and Carrie Dotson said that they had obtained several versions of Cinderella to read to their children before attending the play in a nearby city. They used the books to compare the books and the play.

In summary, most of the teachers involved in this study used read aloud books to reinforce reading related skills. The most widely reinforced skill was listening comprehension which was addressed by everyone to some degree. Teachers also reinforced a variety of other skills including sound/symbol relationships, punctuation, reality versus fantasy, and word identification. Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson seemed to agree with Pappas (1993) about the usefulness of using nonfiction books during read aloud sessions.

Follow-Up Activities

In some classrooms, read aloud sessions were the springboards for other activities. Tamara Clark utilized drama in allowing the children to "become" the characters in The Little Yellow Chick. Several other teachers spoke of "role play" and "acting a story out." Carrie Dotson had the children draw pictures of themselves with a yipiyuk on their toes

after reading Shel Silverstein's poem, "The Yipiyuk." She reviewed body parts with the children to encourage them to draw themselves with all their body parts. She even sent a few to the mirror in the housekeeping center to check on such things as eye color. Julie Shelton, Stephanie Woods, and Jill Wright also had children respond to their books with an art activity. Ms. Wright's class colored in a skyline of a city and glued small pieces of food to the sky. They followed this by writing about a city where something other than food fell from the sky and named their cities. Stephanie Woods used The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle to lead into a lesson on "halves." She had the children pretend that the caterpillar was too full to eat all of specially designed plastic foods and had the children cut the food in half by separating them in the middle. Rachel Stegall used the book The Jigaree to lead into an AlphaTime lesson on the letter "j."

Other follow-up activities observed on the classroom walls or mentioned by the teachers included a bar graph of the children's favorite character from Mrs. Wishy Washy by Joy Cowley, cooking with books such as The Gingerbread Man, and snacks that related to particular books.

In summary, whole language is generally considered congruent with, but not synonymous to, literature-based instruction. The "whole" in whole language is a whole piece of text such as a book or a poem. The premise is that teachers present a whole piece of text and then help children understand the parts (e.g., conventions of print) within the context of the whole. This approach is compatible with an emergent literacy perspective. Literature-based instruction, however, may emanate from other perspectives including skill-based approaches. Some teachers use literature as a means of organizing thematic

integrated curriculum; others may use literature for traditional skill practice. In other words, using literature as a springboard for instruction does not necessarily indicate an emergent literacy perspective. Other than the follow-up writing activity in Jill Wright's classroom, the remaining activities described in this section are not necessarily indicative of an emergent literacy perspective of the teachers providing the activity.

Mechanical Read Aloud Devices

Most teachers utilized technological devices, such as tape recorders, record players, and computers in their classrooms. These devices, in effect, read aloud to the children. Usually, these devices were found in a listening center. In all but two classes, the listening center was supplied with a storybook and tape. Other examples of recorded stories included story records/tapes used during rest time in Leah McIntire's room and in Carrie Dotson's room. Sarah Harper's room was equipped with computers because it had been designated as a demonstration classroom. She had several computer programs that simulated book reading. On the screen was a simulation of a book. As the book was read to the listener who had headphones on, the print was highlighted sentence by sentence.

Choosing Books for Reading Aloud

Most teachers indicated that the books they read related to the current theme whenever possible. The primary source for the books they used in the classroom was the school library; however, several teachers spoke of purchasing copies of books they needed. A few teachers pointed out the need for books with large illustrations and a small amount of text on each page. Several teachers indicated that they read aloud the storybooks and fables that accompany the AlphaTime program. Some also tried to pick

books that related to the letter of the week. Others spoke about allowing children to bring books from home and reading them to the class if they had time during the day.

Encouraging At-Home Reading Aloud

Leah McIntire said, "I push a lot at home about reading to them" indicating that she encouraged parents to read aloud to their children. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker allowed two children per day to check out books from the classroom to take home. Each child took the book home to read with his/her parents and "read" it, or retold it, to the class the next morning. Lisa Cook and Carrie Dotson had book bags they sent home with children to encourage parents to read aloud with their children. The five children who had taken the book bags home for the week returned them the morning I observed Lisa Cook's classroom. She allowed the children to show their favorite illustration, tell about it, and show the project they had completed. She then asked a related question and had each child to call on four friends to answer the question.

In summary, teachers in this study valued read aloud sessions. They used them everyday in the classroom, generally reading theme related books, and they encouraged parents to read to children through such means as book bags and take home books. They utilized mechanical devices such as tape players and computers to read to their students. All teachers followed the pattern of making comments, asking questions, relating the books to the children's lives, and inviting children to join in on predictable sections of the text. However, teachers who stated an interest in whole language were more likely to involve their children in more active roles than the other teachers. They tended to choose highly predictable books to allow for greater involvement and reinforced more literacy

behaviors such as predicting and directionality (left-to-right and top-to-bottom progression) than did their counterparts. They were also more likely to return to books for repeated readings.

Charts

Teachers often used large charts to write the words to songs and poems that related to their units. Most of the teachers in this study said that they used charts but to varying degrees. Julie Shelton said she used them occasionally. Sarah Harper showed me examples that she had used earlier in the year. Several others reported that they used them from time to time. Five teachers, Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, Kathy Watson, and Jill Wright used charts in much the same manner they used read aloud books. They tracked print from left-to-right, they asked children to point out letters and words, they modeled fluent oral reading, and they used them to reinforce skills such as sound/symbol relationships and punctuation. This session from Jill Wright's classroom illustrates the role of charts in these classrooms:

The children came to the group time area. Referring to a chart, Ms. Wright said, "This is a poem that Ms. Davis (the assistant) put in your poem books, so we need to be sure you can read this. Let's read it together." She used the pointer, and they read the poem chorally as she tracked the print..

Weather

*Whether the weather be fine
Or whether the weather be not,
Whether the weather be cold
Or whether the weather be hot,*

*We'll weather the weather
Whatever the weather,
Whether we like it or not.*

(The poem was copied in an AB pattern with alternating yellow and green lines.)

After reading, Ms. Wright asked several questions. For example:

"What does that mean: 'Whether we like it or not'?...Did you hear some rhyming words on here?...Did you see some opposite words?...Have you done it enough to know it?...Let's reread it...What rhymed with 'not'?"

A child responded, "Hot," to this last question, and Ms. Wright pointed to the word "hot" on the chart.

"Did you hear any compound words? Remember meatballs?..."

She then commented, "That's wonderful for a start. Tomorrow we will work on the two 'weathers' (weather and whether). We will do some matching."

Tamara Clark and Jill Wright chose one chart per week to go into a poetry folder for each child. The children could take their poetry folders home for the weekend to read them to family members. A sheet was included in the back of the folders for listeners to sign to show that they had listened to the child read the poem for the week.

Rachel Stegall used "interactive charts" with her students. Interactive charts have a manipulative component, allowing the children to select and place missing words on the chart or match print by attaching magnets to the back of the chart and to the manipulative pieces. The following is an example of an interactive chart that Ms. Stegall's children enjoyed. Each line is written on a sentence strip and then glued to a posterboard. There is

an illustration of a mirror in the upper right corner. The * indicates where a magnet is placed.

* is my hair.
* are my eyes.
I'm * years old
just the right size.
My name is * and as you see
I'm very happy to be me.

On cards with magnets attached to the back are appropriate color words, number words "five" and "six," and the children's names.

In summary, charts with poems written on them were common in the kindergarten classrooms I visited. However, the manner in which teachers utilized them varied. All of the teachers used them to "read" poems and songs with children. Teachers such as Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, Kathy Watson, and Jill Wright used them daily for the same purposes as they used read aloud books. They reinforced literacy related skills such as letter identification, sound/symbol relationships, word relationships, and punctuation through the use of their charts. The charts provided the "whole" piece of text.

Classroom Print

"Environmental print" has come to mean print common to our shared experiences as a culture. Examples would include traffic signs and logos of popular products (Coca-Cola) and of businesses (McDonalds). Parents and other early childhood caregivers

are frequently delighted when they realize their toddler can "read" examples of environmental print. Studies, though not disparaging the use of environmental print, seem to indicate that just exposing children to environmental print does not seem to have a direct connection to learning to read (Masonheimer, Drum, and Ehri, 1984; Vukelich, 1994).

Teachers have for decades utilized the notion of environmental print in the classroom by labeling classroom objects, oftentimes merely sitting back and waiting for it to "stick" in the children's memories. Others have taken a more active role and labeled objects gradually, pointing out the print to the children and referring to it upon occasion. With the advent of whole language, making use of common print materials in classroom areas such as the housekeeping area or a dramatic play area have become common practice. For example, teachers add empty food containers, magazines, and message pads to the housekeeping area and appointment books and prescription pads to a simulated doctor's office.

"Classroom print" as it is being used in this study has a broader definition than "environmental print." While it includes the print mentioned above, classroom print encompasses print common to most kindergarten classrooms though not necessarily common to the broader environment (e.g., classroom calendars and posters promoting reading). Also included under this term are activities in which the teacher writes print that is meaningful in the current context of the classroom. Some of this print is temporal in nature. For example, a child brings a plastic dinosaur for show and tell and the teacher writes the word "brontosaurus" on the chalkboard. Other examples may be

semipermanent in nature. For example the class dictates an experience chart that is hung on the wall. In terms of exclusion, classroom print would not include any print associated with books or part of instructional programs. The term as developed in this study takes on a more idiosyncratic nature than either of those types of print would employ. It is print unique to the kindergarten classroom; and it may, or may not, be common to many classrooms. For example, classroom calendars are common to most kindergarten classrooms whereas experience charts are unique to each classroom. It is print directly under the control of the teacher and/or the students.

This section describes the ways in which kindergarten teachers in this study employed classroom print into their literacy instruction. Topics included are calendars, mystery sentences/messages, writing on the chalkboard, print rich environments (including labels and centers), names, and management systems.

Calendars

One of the first items of business in most of the classrooms observed was "doing" the calendar. Either the teacher or the leader for the day put the next number on the calendar and then lead the class in chorally repeating the date as he or she would point to the day, name of the month, and the date. Typical of this procedure is Julie Shelton's classroom.

Ms. Shelton began, "Let's look at the calendar. Who knows what month it is?"

Ch: March

JS: Who know what M-March begins with?

Ch: M.

JS: Good. Say the days after me.

The children said the days of the week after her, and then she instructed them to say the date after her. She used a pointer to direct their attention to the day, month, and date.

Many teachers asked either the entire class or the leader for the day to choose the appropriate card from a set of days of the weeks cards. Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson extended the calendar routine into a "daily report" activity as described below:

Ms. Clark's class decided that yesterday was Sunday. Today was Monday, and tomorrow would be Tuesday. After each statement Ms. Clark asked a few children to say what they did yesterday, what they were going to do today, and what they planned to do tomorrow. The leader worked on the following sentences which were in a pocket chart. (The words that are underlined are the ones he chose to put in the pocket chart. The other words were permanent.)

Today is Monday

The weather is sunny

It feels warm outside.

He read the sentences independently, and the class counted the number of boys and girls who were present.

As is evident from the examples above, at least some "reading" was involved in the calendar routine. Reading the name of the month is an example of using classroom print

to help children learn such concepts as print has meaning and print constancy. Rachel Stegall also reinforced left-to-right progression during this activity:

Ms. Stegall then took the pointer from the leader and asked the children to say the date with her. When they began, she purposely ran the pointer under the word "February" from right-to-left. When the children protested, she asked, "What's wrong?" They told her she was doing it wrong, so she asked them, "How should I do it?"

Every classroom I observed had a calendar routine near the beginning of the day. In every classroom, the children read the month and the day of the week chorally as the teacher or a child pointed to the print. Several teachers extended the activity by having one or more children select the appropriate day of the week from a set of cards. Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson provided further practice with classroom print through a daily report routine.

Mystery Sentences/Messages

In several classrooms, teachers asked children to decode sentences that they had either written on the chalkboard or on sentence strips. Two variations of this activity are described by classroom:

Tamara Clark

Ms. Clark announced, "It's Stump the Teacher time. I love this because everyone knows kindergartners can't read!" The children protested at her teasing. She pulled a number of sentence strips from a basket and randomly pulled several from the collection, held them

up, and waited for the children to read them. The following were some of the sentences they read:

Bears hibernate in the winter.

In winter frogs sleep in the mud.

The earth is our home.

Columbus discovered America.

Ghosts can be scary or silly. (Some of the children confused "scary" and "silly." Ms. Clark said, "Now look at these words: 'Silly' has what sounds in the middle?")

When she stopped a child said, "Give us more!"

Ms. Clark responded, "I'm going to give you a new one! Ha ha!...Ms. Clark showed the children a sentence strip that had the words, "Amphibians have no hair or fur."

Ch: Abraham (looking at "amphibians").

TC: That's a very good guess. Listen.

She tapped below each word with her pointer in the same rhythm that one might read it. (tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap)

TC: I want someone to come up and tell me words.

A child identified "have." Another child circled the word "no" but said "on." Ms. Clark asked him to look at it again and he corrected it.

TC: Listen carefully: (tap) have no (tap) (tap) (tap).

A child identified "or." Another child circled "fur" but said "for."

TC: Close, but this is "for." (She wrote "for" on the marker board below the sentence strip).

The child then identified the word correctly.

Another child identified "hair."

TC: Listen. Put on your thinking caps. Last week I told you a long word that frogs are and newts are...Yes! Mr.

Hamilton knows it!

"Mr. Hamilton" identified "amphibians." The children read the entire sentence as she pointed to each word. "OK, we'll put this on top (of the marker board), so you can read it throughout the day."

In her interview, I asked Ms. Clark about the purpose for tapping. She explained, "That's just so that they can see that there are some different words, and it is not all one word." She also told me that from time to time she will place an object in a "Mystery Box" and write clues for what is inside. The children decode the clues in order to guess the contents of the box. The contents are related to the current theme.

Kathy Watson

Kathy Watson had a more extensive approach to message writing. In her interview she explained that she started teaching sentence structure and punctuation asking the children to find examples in books. When she first begins message writing it is with a patterned sentence such as "Today is Monday." In about October, she begins adding another sentence about what they will be doing that day. Then for a period of time, she asks children to write the messages. Later, she begins the patterned writing

demonstrated below concerning each of the children in the room. The day I observed was to be the last day for that pattern because she had written about all of them. Children would begin writing the messages again.

"Please read what I am writing about one of our students and also look for any mistakes. Ms. Watson might make some mistakes."

She wrote the following on the marker board:

Morgan is a girl.

She likes to play?

She likes to paint.

She has brown hair.

KW: Who are we talking about, Dana?

Ch: Morgan.

KW: Morgan begins with what letter?

Ch: M.

KW: M. What sound does "m" begin with?

Ch: /m/

Ms. Watson asked a child to circle the word "Morgan."

*KW: Who can read a sentence?...Stephen, which sentence
(are you going to read)?*

*The child read the second sentence (She likes to play?) and told her
she had made a mistake.*

KW: What mistake?

Ch: The question mark.

KW: Why? What's wrong?

Ch: It's a telling sentence.

KW: Who can tell me why this is a telling sentence?

The children respond and another child volunteered to read the first sentence.

KW: Let's review Sensible Sam.

They read the chart posted on the chalkboard at the front of the room illustrated with a picture of Sensible Sam:

Does that make sense?

Does that sound right?

Does that look right?

KW: I'm looking for another reader. OK, Cassie, which sentence?

The child read the third sentence correctly.

KW: If we come to a word we don't know we will get Sensible Sam to help us.

Ch: (beginning to read the fourth sentence) She can brown...

Ms. Watson pointed to each word and tapped lightly.

KW: The first question is: Does that make sense? The child corrected to "She has brown..." but stopped on "hair."

KW: Does that sound right? Does that look right? OK, does this look right because what sound does 'h' have?

The child (along with some help from the class) read the entire sentence correctly.

KW: If I read something wrong, clap your hands.

She pointed to the words with a baton and read "party" for "play" and "green" for "brown." The children clapped at the appropriate times.

KW: What can't this (word) be 'green'?

Ch: It starts with /b/.

KW: What does green start with? (g) OK, you read.

The children read the sentences chorally as Ms. Watson tracked the print with her pointer.

KW: Ben, come up and circle the word "paint."...I would like for Justin to come up and circle the word "hair."...

She continued to call children to come and circle various words in the sentences. The other children clapped once if the child circled the correct word.

KW: Why can I use "she" in place of the word "Morgan"?...

Does "she" and "Morgan" mean the same thing?...Don't forget to be good detectives.

When a child was supposed to circle "has" and circled "likes" instead,

KW: Just a minute, Michael, think. What does /h/ /h/ has start with?

He corrected it.

*KW: Why did you circle this word?...What letter do you hear
in /h/ /h/ has?*

Ms. Watson used the "Sensible Sam" poster throughout the day to help children learn to use context clues and graphophonic clues to decode unfamiliar words.

As noted above, a number of teachers used classroom print in the forms of mystery sentences and messages to encourage decoding and the use of familiar sight words. These messages were often predictable in nature following the same pattern for a number of different messages. Sometimes they were theme related, as in Tamara Clark's amphibians sentence. Others were related to the children or to the date. Sarah Harper indicated that she used only words that contained letters and letter sounds that the class had covered prior to that time, so the children could sound out all the words. This obviously was not the case with the use of words such as "amphibians." Kathy Watson used her message activity to reinforce the use of the three cuing systems, semantics, syntax, and graphophonic, and to review sentence structure and punctuation.

In summary, although a number of teachers used mystery sentences and messages to encourage children to read, the assumptions behind that activity varied. Some teachers used it as a means of promoting blending known letter sounds into words--a reading readiness skill--while others encouraged the use of all three cuing systems through highly contextualized language centering around the current theme, the date, or the children themselves--a whole language/emergent literacy construct.

Writing on the Chalkboard

Another example of classroom print is the writing of words on the chalkboard, or in some cases a markerboard, by the teacher. In this process, children can see meaningful print. Typically, a word will be introduced, such as at the beginning of a new unit of study, or a child will bring a topic to the attention of the class through a sharing time or show and tell. The teacher will then write the word on the board, sometimes asking the children to supply letters as she segments the phonemes of the word. When the word is complete, the children read the word chorally.

Julie Shelton said that in her 19 years of kindergarten teaching she had "always written words on the board" even before she believed that children were capable of reading the words. Melinda Burton reviewed the contents of the lesson she had just completed on "hearing" by writing the children's responses to her questions on the board. As Carrie Dotson wrote the word "Yipiyuk" on the board, her children spontaneously called out the letters as she wrote. This procedure was so routine that when I questioned Ms. Dotson about it in the interview, she did not recall that it had happened. Although she said that she encourages the children to say the letters as she writes at the beginning of the year to reinforce letter identification, she remarked, "I haven't even thought about that they still do it." Jill Wright and Tamara Clark wrote the number of boys and the number of girls present (e.g., 11 boys + 9 girls = 20 children in all) on the board and then assisted the children in deciding how many children were present in all. The class then read the numerals and words chorally.

Writing words on the board appears to be a common practice in the kindergarten classroom. Writing a review of the lesson, as Melinda Burton did, is akin to experience charts which will be discussed later. In all cases, the print was identified for the children by the teachers. In some instances, teachers used the procedure to reinforce letter identification and/or sound/symbol relationships.

Print Rich Environment

Whole language supporters recommend a print rich environment (Raines & Canady, 1990). Most of the classrooms involved in this study could be classified as print rich. Books were available in every classroom. Some of the teachers promoted reading or looking at books during center time, when the children arrived in the morning, and during transition times. There seemed to be certain "givens" as far as classroom environmental print was concerned. For example, there was the obligatory alphabet chart in every classroom, usually located above the chalkboard, and often there was a poster with the letters of the alphabet beside items beginning with each letter. The children's names were in most cases on their tables, on their cubbies, and sometimes on their assigned group time places on the floor. Rules for classroom behavior were posted in almost every classroom as was a display of the management system for the classroom. Children's names were often posted on these displays. Bulletin boards with titles and posters with print decorated each room. Menus, memos to parents, and other examples of functional print were typically posted near doorways or near the teachers' desks. Cutouts of various descriptions labeled with the color words were seen in a number of the classrooms as were birthday graphs charting the children's birthdates by month. Finally, "helper charts" which

listed various classroom duties along with the names of those children assigned those duties were common in these classrooms. Two other methods for making classrooms print rich, labeling classroom objects and centers, are discussed separately.

Labels

Labeling classroom objects is such a common practice that commercial labels are available for items such as: clock, desk, door, etc. All of the teachers in this study had labels on various objects in the room with the exception of Julie Shelton. She explained, "We used to have to label everything. We don't anymore....it was on our report card. Now it is not."

Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson not only had labels such as "table, filing cabinet, sink," they had a patterned sentence written on sentence strips labeling many of the objects. The sentence labels read "This is a table. This is a filing cabinet. This is a sink." Ms. Clark explained it to a curious child: "Remember in the book Jump Frog Jump, it has 'This is...'? I thought I would follow that pattern and label some things in our room."

Jill Wright advised parents to label items in their children's rooms when they begin to read to encourage them to learn to recognize meaningful words, as she explained:

If the parent comes to me and says, you know, this child is just driving me crazy. They want to read. They want to know what all the signs are. The first thing that I suggest to them is to write down on a piece of paper and label the things in a child's room....

Teachers labeled objects in 13 of the 14 classrooms in this study, adding to the print rich environments their students experienced.

Centers

Many center activities involved print and therefore added to the richness of print available in the classroom. The centers that fit this distinction are described below.

Reading Centers

Every classroom in this study had a book shelf stocked with books. As mentioned earlier, in many classrooms children were encouraged to get a book when they arrived early in the morning or anytime they had finished one activity and were waiting to begin another. Several teachers had worked hard to make the reading center appealing to the children. Candace Adams' reading center had a child-sized rocking chair, two floor pillows, three stuffed bears, and one stuffed dinosaur. Children could sit on a bean bag and look at books in Melinda Burton's reading center. In Rachel Stegall's reading center there was a large yellow "Old Woman's Shoe" fashioned from appliance boxes. There was a hole in the side of the shoe to allow the children to crawl inside with a book. Jill Wright had an old fashioned bathtub lined with a rug and supplied with a pillow and stuffed animals. There was another large pillow on the floor, so the children could sit on it and read.

In many reading centers there were attractive posters promoting reading. Books available usually centered around the current theme. There were often books left over from previous units per the children's requests as well as AlphaTime books, counting books, and alphabet books. In some classrooms, books that the children had made were on the shelves. Tamara Clark had a separate basket for "Books written by our class authors." Several teachers indicated that as they read books from a theme they would

place them on the shelves. Candace Adams chose books for her reading center that she felt the children could read with some success:

Those (the books on the shelf) are things they are familiar with and they are comfortable with them. They like those books they have made themselves.

I: So those are books that you hope they read themselves?

CA: A lot of them. Now Where the Wild Things Are, they are not going to be able to read all those words, but even if they can sit down and look at the pictures, and you will hear some (children) over there saying, "And he said (blah, blah blah)" making their own script. But they know kind of what the story says, and you know they are just following along with the pictures.

Julie Shelton instructed the children assigned to the book center in her room to listen to a phonics record. The children each held a laminated card while the record instructed them to point to certain pictures beginning with the focal letters, "b" and "n." After the record was finished, the children drew pictures that began with the two letters and wrote each letter once. They did not look at the books.

Language Arts Centers

Candace Adams, Carrie Dotson, Sarah Harper, Rachel Stegall, and Stephanie Woods had separate language arts centers. The centers were equipped with activities such as letter matching games, alphabetical order games, color word games, and letter puzzles.

Carrie Dotson had a small marker board labeled with the six animals used in a recent class book. The children used magnetic plastic letters to spell the words below the labels.

Computers in Centers

Several teachers had computers in use during center time. Sarah Harper had the computer demonstration classroom equipment and used computers at all of her centers. As described earlier, several of the programs simulated reading books by having the child listen on earphones while highlighting each sentence as it is read. Ms. Harper felt that these programs were beneficial in helping her students learn to read. She said, "Some of (my children from last year) that did not read right away caught on to reading real quick because they saw words highlighted."

Seven of the other classrooms had IBM's Writing to Read program available to them. The teachers' views on that program and its use in their classrooms will be discussed under the Writing section of this report. None of the classrooms was using Writing to Read when I observed. Two classes were using literacy related software, however. Carrie Dotson's children played a game that required them to match days of the week words. Julie Shelton had three children using the "Put It Frog" software, which was a game requiring the children to identify initial consonant sounds.

Housekeeping/Dramatic Play Centers

Every classroom observed had a housekeeping center. The child-sized furniture items were typically labeled. Other literacy items available in the centers varied. They included such items as empty food containers, a telephone book, a poster of the food pyramid, and crates labeled "Hats" and "Shoes." Melinda Burton had a separate dramatic

play area which simulated a pet store. There were signs for "Super Pet Store" and "Big Sale Today!" Included were containers for various pet foods and a "pretend" care manual with the title "Cool Cats."

Three teachers had transformed their housekeeping centers into theme related dramatic play areas. Literacy related items were found in each center. Leah McIntire's housekeeping center had become a clinic to go along with her Heart Healthy unit. There were two posters from the Heart Association and a smock for the "patient" to wear. The smock diagrammed and labeled the major organs of the body. Stephanie Woods had "Ethel's Beauty Shop" in her classroom. A price list was posted on the wall, and paper for writing in appointments was supplied. Jill Wright had a nameplate with the words "Dr. Toothacher, D.D.S." on a desk with an appointment book and a bill. There were two posters and a number of brochures promoting dental health also in the center.

Whole language supporters advocate "immersing" children in print. Most of the teachers in this study provided a print rich environment. The richness of the environments ranged from classrooms with print common to all classrooms such as calendars, alphabet charts, book centers, and helper charts to classrooms with walls literally covered with print. Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson immersed their children in print. These two classrooms had print ranging from the usual forms listed above to child generated print to many posters covering every wall from the floor to the ceiling.

Names

Uses of children's names have been integrated throughout much of the description thus far. Two uses have not yet been addressed, however. In five classrooms, the

children came in each morning, found their names which were written on cards, and placed them in various locations as a means of practicing recognizing their names in print and taking attendance. Three teachers evaluated if their children could recognize their names in print by laying lunch tickets on a table and having the children locate their own.

Management Systems

As mentioned earlier, most of the classrooms had some sort of management system displayed on a bulletin board which involved the children's names. Two other teachers wrote children's names on the chalkboard to indicate breaking a classroom rule. In Lisa Cook's classroom, she or her assistant wrote the infraction beside the name of a child who had repeated warnings. Tamara Clark wrote the word "Play" on the chalkboard at one point during the morning to signal her children that they needed to calm down. Later she wrote just "Pla" as a warning that they were in danger of losing some of their recess time.

In summary, classroom print takes many forms and since it was defined as teacher/student controlled print, it is by definition unique to each classroom. Examples of classroom print such as calendars, writing on the chalkboard, labels, reading centers, and the use of children's names were common to almost every classroom. The extent of the print rich environment, activities revolving around mystery sentences and messages, and the use of print at centers varied from classroom to classroom.

Skills Instruction

Many areas of skills instruction have been addressed throughout this report. Most teachers provided instruction on letters of the alphabet and relied on read aloud sessions and classroom print to enhance kindergartners' skill development. However, some areas

have not been presented in any section thus far, yet are an integral part of the literacy instruction of this group of kindergarten teachers. Some of these skills were taught within the context of other literacy events and others were taught as isolated drill. The skills are word recognition, distinguishing left from right, and book handling. Also included are sections on worksheets and formal reading instruction, that is, reading instruction that relies on a basal reading series.

Word Recognition

Most of the word recognition instruction I observed was within the context of reading big books aloud, reading charts chorally, or reading messages and mystery sentences. Candace Adams explained that because she had finished covering the letters of the alphabet on a weekly basis, she was now concentrating on teaching various groups of words including color words, number words, and "first grade words." Ms. Adams relied on both contextual and drill methods for teaching word recognition. Jill Wright had children drill each other on days of the week words and color words, using flashcards as part of the reading center. Carrie Dotson and Kathy Watson taught brief lessons on rimes and onsets (word families) demonstrating how to make new words by merely changing the onset. Carrie Dotson had several teacher-made cutouts with pull-through strips. The rime was written in marker on the cutout and the onsets were on the pull-through strip situated so that as the strip was pulled through the slots, new words were formed. The cutout was shaped like the first word of each set. Kathy Watson pulled the word "dad" from her word box, asked the children to identify it, and then had them help her think of words that rhymed with "dad" and decide how to spell each new word as she wrote it on the

markerboard. Sarah Harper described a similar lesson to me when I asked about several lists of rhyming words on the marker board.

Many of the teachers in this study, even the ones interested in whole language techniques, used skill-and-drill methods from time to time for word recognition. Several teachers taught their children lists of words such as color words and days of the week words. Candace Adams was the only teacher that mentioned the list of "first grade words," leading me to believe that either the other kindergarten teachers did not concern themselves with teaching those words or first grade teachers in every school did not ask it of the kindergarten teachers. However, none of the other teachers in Ms. Adams' school mentioned them either.

Distinguishing Left and Right

Teaching children to distinguish left from right is sometimes considered a reading skill because it is seen as a precursor for helping them to establish directionality. Most of the teachers observed reinforced distinguishing left from right incidentally throughout the day. Lisa Cook reminded the children that their right hand was the one closest to the window as they looked at the flag just prior to reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Carrie Dotson played an activity record that directed the children to place either their left hands or their right hands on various body parts. While playing with a parachute in the gymnasium, Leah McIntire asked children to hold the parachute with only their left hands and move to the right in merry-go-round fashion. Rachel Shelton had the children hold up their right hands while looking at the new bulletin board to help them determine that Pluto

was the planet farthest to the right. Kathy Watson asked the children to raise their left hands if they agreed that the weather was sunny.

Several teachers had cutouts of left hands and right hands on either side of their chalkboards. Julie Shelton explained the green and red dots I observed in several places around her classroom:

I started that several years ago. I just kind of came up with it myself.

I explain to the children that that is real important that you learn to read and write in first grade. And green always means go. Look to the green dot for left. This is where we go. That's the way we're going to learn to write our name; this is where we learn to read. And red for right because that means stop. I buy these little dots at the first of the year, and we put them on our hands. I make them say "left and right." Then I have a computer game that is real cute about left and right. And most of them know it; some of them don't....

Although I did not witness any formal lessons on distinguishing left from right, it seemed to be the skill most reinforced on an incidental basis. Almost every teacher reinforced it at some point during the day.

Book Handling

Kindergarten teachers not only teach children what is in books, they teach them about books. Cautions to take care of the books children were using were the most frequent directions I heard on the topic. Sarah Harper helped her children understand about pagination in books when they were assembling small duplicated books about space.

She demonstrated how one number was on one side of the page and the following number was on the other side of the page. Lisa Cook and Kathy Watson spoke of teaching children that books are our friends. When a group of her children were taking turns showing the class the books they made about the life cycle of a butterfly, Ms. Cook prompted them with comments such as "Turn your page, Honey." and "The other direction. You have to make sure a book goes the right way." In the last example, the child was holding the book to enable the other children to see making turning the pages backwards to what she would normally do.

As with distinguishing left from right, book handling instruction seemed to be second nature with the teachers in this study. Although there were no formal lessons on the matter, it was the topic of frequent incidental teaching.

Organized Reading Instruction

Two teachers extended their skills instruction to include books from the reading series adopted by the Vicksburg school system. Sarah Harper and Stephanie Woods spoke of borrowing the readiness level books from the first grade teachers to use with a group of children toward the end of the year. Sarah Harper felt that the first book in the series should be taught in kindergarten.

After we finish the alphabet,...I really try to encourage (the children who know the letter sounds) to read. I do some organized reading the last six weeks. I won't deny it, because I came from upper grades. I don't force it on anybody. I don't make it stressful for them. But we do go back through sounds, and we begin to recognize words and try

to sound them out and things like that to teach them to read....

Stephanie Woods divided her class into three groups according to ability and worked with them during rest time. At the time of the interview, she was teaching the highest group color words and using the readiness books as well.

For these two teachers, skills instruction extended to using the first book in the basal reading series. It was used with those children who seemed to be excelling in identifying letter sounds and who the teachers deemed ready.

Worksheets

All of the teachers I observed gave their children at least one duplicated paper at some point in the day. Several of these would probably be better classified as "coloring sheets" rather than worksheets, however. For example, Lisa Cook gave her children a duplicated puzzle of a Tyrannosaurus Tex, and Leah McIntire gave her children a picture of Mr. D from the AlphaTime program to take home and color. Most of the teachers felt that worksheets should not be used extensively in kindergarten. Carrie Dotson summed up the general feeling about worksheets with this statement:

Now and then I do use dittos some, but that's probably the last choice I would have, and that's probably at the end of the unit. It's a quick way to check everybody...the hands-on is a little bit harder (way to check). I want to see if they can transfer to paper, too, because sometimes they have it (in their minds) and then it doesn't make sense on the paper. I do do dittos some, but it's usually the very end thing. It's certainly not what I teach with....

Several teachers expressed a concern that if they did not use some worksheets with the children, they would have a difficult adjustment to first grade. Tamara Clark told me, "You have to have some worksheets to get them ready for first grade." As noted earlier, Sarah Harper had a different opinion than most of her colleagues. She felt that kindergarten children needed to complete paper and pencil type activities so they would not be "floor(ed)" in first grade.

Although many of the teachers in this study objected in principle to requiring kindergarten students to complete worksheets, lauding "hands on" activities instead, most felt that some worksheets were necessary. The reason given for this necessity was not for the learning that might be derived from them but to prepare their students for what they felt was inevitable in first grade. Even Sarah Harper, who labeled herself as a paper-and-pencil teacher, discussed the use of worksheets in terms of preparing children for the rigors of first grade rather than for skill instruction or practice.

Summary of Reading Instruction

Reading instruction in these kindergartens was a very complex process involving a myriad of activities. These activities fell into four broad categories: letter recognition and letter/ sound instruction, read aloud sessions which included books and charts, "classroom print" which included messages written by the teacher for the purpose of decoding and the print rich environment, and skills instruction. Teachers utilized activities attributed to both the reading readiness and emergent literacy perspectives. No one teacher was "totally" reading readiness or "totally" emergent literacy. For example, Kathy Watson, who labeled herself as a "whole language teacher" and chose activities primarily associated with that

perspective had a 15 minute formal writing lesson, an activity clearly designed to isolate a letter and to teach a skill. On the other hand, Sarah Harper, who labeled herself as a "paper-and-pencil" teacher, did on occasion read charts with her children and take dictation from them, both activities related to the emergent literacy perspective.

Veteran kindergarten teachers such as Leah McIntire and Carrie Dotson seemed adept at reinforcing skills throughout the day, seizing teachable moments as they appeared. Furthermore, it seemed to become an almost subconscious effort. For example, when I questioned Ms. McIntire about why she used the parachute activity to reinforce beginning consonants, she did not at first recall that she had done so.

Whole language teachers also reinforced literacy skills throughout the day. The integrated nature of this approach seemed to lend itself to almost constant skills reinforcement through activities such as reading big books, charts, and classroom print. In contrast, in classrooms where worksheets were used to practice literacy skills, the particular skill under focus was only addressed during that activity. There was no occasion for the children to use that skill again in their work or play. The natural consequence of the two approaches described is that whole language teachers tend to spend more time overall on literacy instruction than do skills-based teachers.

Writing Instruction

Modeling writing is not a new concept in kindergarten literacy instruction; however, providing experiences in which the children themselves write is relatively new. The reading readiness perspective maintains that children who are not ready to read at five years of age are not ready to write either. Instruction in writing is

typically withheld until children have learned to read--usually around third grade. The underlying assumption is that children need to be able to read words in order to be able to spell them.

The emergent literacy perspective, on the other hand, legitimates the writing attempts of very young children. The scribbles of the two-year-old are seen as attempts at communication and evidence that the child understands the purpose behind writing, even though the attempts to recreate it are at an immature level. Children are seen as developing their writing skills in stages. The stages are recursive in nature rather than linear, however. According to Sulzby, Teale, and Kamberelis (1989), children typically progress from scribbling to drawing to nonphonetic letter strings to invented spelling.

Leah McIntire in discussing how literacy instruction had changed over the course of her 22 year career made this observation:

I'll tell you what is very different. What has changed and evolved, is the writing component. We always used words. We always wrote them down. We didn't always give children the opportunity to do their own writing. The pre-writing. The stages of writing. The opportunity to just accept whatever they put down.

Kathy Watson, who has been teaching since 1971, also saw the advent of whole language as a turning point in writing instruction in kindergarten. She said, "Before whole language the children were writing , but (now) they are writing more..."

This section explores both creative/informational writing and handwriting instruction. The first segment describes the various methods of creative/ informational

writing instruction that kindergarten teachers employ. The categories include group writing, journal writing, dictation, the use of sentence starters, and individual writing at a writing center. Teacher's encouragement of and attitudes toward invented spelling as it relates to children's writing are also described. The last portion of this section is devoted to handwriting instruction.

Creative/Informational Writing

Creative writing in kindergarten may take the form of filling in one or more words in a sentence starter, or it may be dictating facts about the heart to a scribe. It may be done in a whole group setting or individually at the writing center. It may be functional, informative, or purely for enjoyment.

Group Writing

While all group writing activities involved the teacher taking dictation from the whole class, these took several forms in the kindergarten classes I observed. In one classroom, the children supplied text for a wordless book. In three other classrooms, the group writing sessions served as reviews of lessons or of the current units. In one of the latter, the group writing preceded children's individual writing on the same topic.

Tamara Clark utilized two wordless books by Mercer Mayer, Frog Goes to Dinner and Frog on His Own in her group writing. She introduced the lesson and the characters by reading the children's version of Frog Goes to Dinner. The book had photocopied illustrations from the original accompanied by text written by the children at an earlier date. They discussed why the cover said "retold by" Ms. Clark's Class rather than "by"

Ms. Clark's Class. Next, the class looked at transparencies of the illustrations from Frog on His Own. The children and Ms. Clark talked freely back and forth in very animated fashion about what was happening in the story. At one point Ms. Clark exclaimed, "Oh! It gets better! Look at this!"

After all of the illustrations had been discussed, Ms. Clark asked the children if they would like to write about this book as they had Frog Goes to Dinner. The children agreed wholeheartedly and the following took place:

Ms. Clark went back to the first transparency and started again, this time asking the children to tell the story. The children freely called out sentences. Ms. Clark did not attempt to write every suggestion (she explained her reasoning later in the interview). She wrote all of the text on one transparency, changing the illustrations when the children seemed to be through commenting on a particular page. She wrote the next page number and continued writing. She repeated what she was writing as she went along.

"Let's look at page 1. Don't we need to sort of set the story up and say what it was like...What kind of day was it?"

The children called out words like "sunny, summer, etc." and began giving suggestions for what to write.

Ms. Clark wrote "It was a summer day when Timmy and Jammer went to the city park." "End of my sentence, right? Page 2. We are just going to do a couple of pages today."

The following is what Ms. Clark wrote for each page. The children were so involved in the story that she extended the number of pages that they were going to do several times.

Page 2

Jammer screamed, "I'm squished. I don't want to be in this bucket.

I'm looking for lunch.

Turtle replies (TC: "that means answered"), "You're going to be in trouble."

Page 3

"Bye, Bye," says Jammer. (TC: "Wait, Chris added something. Chris, what did you want to say?) Bye, Bye, you big snapping turtle says (TC: "you always have to say who says something) Jammer. (TC: "One more page.")

Page 4

Yummy. I see lunch.

Page 5

SNAP! (TC: "I'm going to put that in capital letters since you said it with so much expression.") Jammer's tongue sticks to a bee.

Page 6

(TC: How about if we just say what is happening?...How about...)

Jammer's tongue rolls around the bee.

Page 7

"OUCH!" (TC: "I'm listening for more comments...") OW YA-YA-YA

YIKES-O, "I should not have eaten this bee." (TC: I'm going to put

my talking marks here.) AH-AH-AH-AH

"Tomorrow, we will continue our story...."

In the interview, Ms. Clark explained the activity:

As you can see, I did not do the transparency as far as modeling writing. I didn't talk about capital letters, talking marks or anything. I felt like...we would have lost the spontaneity of the text....You (can) get bogged down in that, but...now tomorrow,...we'll go mark the talking marks. And another day we may go mark something else. So, I'll do the skills after I introduce it. We've had fun with it and played with it for awhile....I will run it on transparencies, just so they can see me writing it. I am just modeling, but I am not doing any kind of skill. And then, I'll transfer it to paper....(In) the next couple of days I want to share that big book that we made again, but we will go through and look for specific skills, like capital letters (and) probably talking marks....

I: What I think is interesting--I've never seen anybody do it quite this way--they were all talking to you at the same time and you...

TC: The reason I did that is because there is no way I could ever hear every person one on one...so, I was letting them do that. And I was just being selective about which was the best one. (chuckle).

I: **Okay, well, I wanted to ask how you decide what to write?**

TC: ...I was just sort of listening and the one that seemed to be the most "with it" (is the one I recorded)...you know, every once in a while (the children say things) that don't really fit... and even the kids will say, "That doesn't make sense there."

Several teachers used group writing sessions to review facts about the current unit or lesson. Melinda Burton reviewed facts about ears and hearing through a question and answer session with her class. As they responded to her questions, she wrote the answers on the chalkboard in list fashion. Kathy Watson ended a two week long experiment concerning what would happen to pieces of construction paper taped to the window by writing the children's responses to what they observed. Leah McIntire used group writing to review facts about the heart. This group session served as a rehearsal, or prewriting session, for the children who each wrote a page using invented spelling to contribute to a class big book about the heart.

In summary, four teachers used whole group writing sessions during my observations. Tamara Clark used the illustrations of a wordless book to prompt her children to write creatively. Melinda Burton, Leah McIntire, and Kathy Watson used their group writing sessions to review science topics. Analysis of the writing sessions showed

that the teachers used the activities to reinforce a number of literacy skills. Tamara Clark reinforced the concept of setting, sentence structure, vocabulary, and various conventions of print. In the interview, she indicated that she had not talked about capitals and talking marks, when in fact she had. Apparently, it had become such a natural procedure for her that it was subconscious. Other teachers used group informational writing to review sound/symbol relationships, extend and clarify ideas, and print constancy. Children saw first hand the use of the literacy skills reinforced through their own writings.

Experience Charts

Another variation of group writing is the experience chart. The purpose of experience charts, an activity popularized by the Language Experience Approach (LEA) in the 1970s, is to show children the relationship between the spoken and written word.

Raines and Canady (1990) explain LEA and experience charts:

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) to reading instruction is based on the premise that the first reading material used for instruction should be meaningful, and that the most meaningful words are the ones the children speak when they tell about some experience they share. For example, after children share an "experience," such as taking a walk together, then they talk about it. The teacher writes down their words, taking dictation from them. The teacher may take dictation from individual children or choose to print a group of children's sentences on a large chart called an experience chart. The children watch the teacher convert their spoken words into written ones. After the dictation process,

the teacher reads what the child has said or invites the child to read.... (p. 18)

I did not observe anyone writing an experience chart with their children, but there were completed charts displayed in both Carrie Dotson's and Lisa Cook's rooms. Carrie Dotson had a very lengthy experience chart displayed in the hallway outside the classroom entitled "Our Trip to See Cinderella." When the children assembled for calendar time, they discussed their trip briefly; and Ms. Dotson said, "Remember we wrote a story about it, and it's in the hall? Everyone says they really like it." Two other charts displayed in the room had posters attached to the tops. Below were the children's words as they told the story portrayed by the picture. Ms. Dotson explained that those were completed by dividing the class in half. One group dictated to her, and the other group dictated to her assistant.

Just prior to my initial contacts with the teachers to ask for their participation in this study, a feature article had appeared in the Vicksburg Press about kindergarten children's versions of the Superbowl. The children in the article were identified as Ms. Dotson's class. She explained the process involved in that group writing activity.

We talk about the weekend on Monday. "What did you do? Did you do anything special? Did you go anywhere?" And somebody will say something about the Superbowl, and I'll say, "Superbowl? What's the Superbowl?" I try to get information from everybody. Most of the time when I'm doing it in large group, some of the same children will want to talk (dominate the conversation), and I try to let everybody have a turn....They'll start talking and say, "The Superbowl is football." (I'll

ask), "Well, who played?" I sort of lead them like that...and I'm writing just as fast as I can. (My assistant) and I will write it up, and then we'll go back over it. We'll read it with the kids....

Earlier she had explained to me that she sent a copy of the Superbowl chart home in a monthly newsletter. One of the parents had sent it to the newspaper to be published.

Several charts were hanging from the ceiling in Ms. Cook's room. There were not only experience charts such as the one entitled "Robot-bot-bot" about a robot's visit to the classroom, but also lists dictated by the children on a variety of topics. One was a list under the title "Evaporation Experiment." The first few lines were:

Evaporation
Experiment

1. It will turn red.
2. It will turn stale.
3. It will turn yellow.

The seventh item on the list was "It will dry up. the one without the lid."

I asked Ms. Cook to explain the chart to me.

We also bring in science with our letters (indicating that this experiment was done during "E" week)....I begin a lot of things trying to find out what they know. I tell them that everybody's ideas are good. All ideas are good, but not all ideas are true. Some are pretend ideas and some are just people not knowing what is real...so we don't ever laugh....I say, "Let's look at this experiment, and everybody tell me what you think is going to happen....In February (when the water is completely evaporated),

we go back and say, "What did happen? Did the paper turn yellow?" We put an "X," and then we circle or we check whatever we think was a true statement....

A similar type of group writing was displayed on the back wall of Ms. Clark's room. Attached at different places on a mural of pond life constructed by the children were sentence strips with questions about frogs. Below each question was a sentence strip in a different color with the answer. In Ms. Watson's room there was a similar bulletin board of dinosaur cut outs with questions and answers attached to it. Nearby was a chart tablet with a number of unanswered questions written on it. When I questioned the two teachers about the questions and answers, they both explained that at the beginning of a unit they solicit from the children questions they want answered about the new topic. The children dictate the questions as the teachers write them on sentence strips or chart paper. Throughout the unit, as they read nonfiction books about their topics and find answers, they will ask the children to dictate the answer and then display the question and the answer together.

In summary, several teachers used experience charts, and variations thereof, as a means of composing in a whole group or small group situation. Lisa Cook and Carrie Dotson utilized experience charts in a traditional way. Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson used a form more common to a whole language approach. Because I did not observe the process and the teachers did not specifically address the issue, it is difficult to determine if the teachers used these writing activities to reinforce literacy skills; however, it appears

that they did because Ms. Cook used her Evaporation Experiment chart to have children identify all the "e's" and underline them.

Journal Writing

Journal writing is promoted by whole language/emergent literacy advocates as a valuable activity in early childhood education. While it is acknowledged that many young children cannot write in a conventional manner, it is viewed as a method of valuing their writing whether they communicate through scribbling or invented spelling. To assist children in becoming accustomed to writing in journals, some teachers allow drawing, copying words from the environment, and patterned sentence writing such as "I like _____." While journal writing was observed only in Tamara Clark's and Kathy Watson's rooms, three other teachers commented on the use of journals during their interviews. First, a description of the interaction between Kathy Watson and a group of students writing in their journals is provided:

Ms. Watson went to the children writing in their journals and asked them to read what they were writing to her. She stretched the /b/ and /e/ sounds in "bunny" for a child, and then said, "That's a good approximation." To another child: "What are you going to write today? ...What do you hear?..." She referred the children to the alphabet cards for help in determining which letters they were hearing. (Ms. Watson calls the alphabet cards "cheat sheets." They are cards with letters of the alphabet beside pictures beginning with each letter.) Ms. Watson asked the class to clean up and meet her on the carpet (group time area)

...We are going to hear from our journals. Jason, will you share?

Everyone be quiet and listen."

C1: (reading from journal) I see Stacy. I see Darren. I see Tyler.

C2 (reading) I see blue, pink, yellow. (She had written the color words with a colored mark to the side of each).

C3: (reading) I see Darren. I see Allison.

The children applauded the writers with a "Jello clap." A Jello clap is a noiseless clap with hands cupped. Ms. Watson asked each writer what color of Jello clap they wanted and then asked them to say it in Spanish.

Ms. Watson explained her thoughts on journals during her interview.

They are not doing enough in them. But I don't know at this time how to re-arrange the schedule....The way I work it, is that they write, and I just go around and spot check (to see) if they have any questions..... I just encourage them to write what they hear--to use approximations. They feel comfortable with that. You can look at a lot of their journals, (and see that) they are just hung up on "I see (blank)." That is their security right now. And as long as they are writing, I don't say anything. They can write "I see (blank)" all day if they want to, but I do try to gently encourage them to go beyond just that simple sentence.

Both teachers I observed using journal writing had a rule that the children could write anything or copy anything that they wished as long as they could read what they had written during the sharing time that followed. Candace Adams indicated that she used journals in her classroom, too.

Lisa Cook and Jill Wright both stated that they felt kindergartners were too young to begin journal writing. Lisa Cook voiced the strongest negative reaction to journal writing in kindergarten:

I have tried them before....Everybody says they should have journals, but...I rarely have more than one or two a year who can handle--really doing anything. Now I know that people say, "Well, it doesn't matter. They can scribble on every page." But I'm not sure that, personally, I see the value in that. I have had first grade teachers, and even second and third grade (teachers, tell me) that (the children) don't want them (journals), because they've had them since they were in kindergarten. They don't have the interest anymore. I'm wondering if starting journals in kindergarten isn't starting something a little early....It's like starting to wear a bra too early. It's just not necessary. It takes away from that plus thing of starting it when they're ready to actually write something. Now, my children can copy things, but I don't see anything in that....I (can't) see any actual learning from that....

Jill Wright concurred with the sentiment of Lisa Cook's statement saying that she felt that kindergarten was too early for journals because she did not feel her children were ready

for them. However, she required children to write her notes when they were assigned to the writing center and place them in her mailbox. She referred to this a "precursor to journal writing."

Opinions on journal writing varied widely among the teachers in this study. Obviously, Kathy Watson valued their use highly, expressing concern that she could not devote more time to it. Two other teachers voiced criticism of using journal writing because they felt their children were not ready. Both of these teachers are veteran kindergarten teachers with more than 20 years experience; however, Jill Wright expressed an interest in whole language and did other whole language type activities with her children as noted throughout the report. It seems, however, that she was not comfortable with requiring children to write in journals.

Dictation

Taking dictation from individual children is seen as a method of scaffolding, or supporting, their attempts to write. Most of the teachers in this study indicated that they take dictation from their children. Tamara Clark and Carrie Dotson said that they no longer took dictation after they finished covering the letters of the alphabet. At that point, they began having the children use invented spelling for their writings. I observed writing through dictation in Julie Shelton's classroom, Jill Wright's classroom, and Kathy Watson's classroom. In the first two classrooms, the teachers took dictation from every student as a follow-up activity for a read aloud session. When children painted pictures in Ms. Watson's classroom, they routinely brought them to her and dictated a sentence or two about their paintings. She wrote the sentences on sentence strips and taped them to the

bottom of the painting. As part of her "Opening" the next morning, she would show the paintings to the class and ask the children to read the sentences. She then displayed the paintings and the sentences for approximately a week before the children took them home.

Julie Shelton had children draw pictures in response to the story they heard and then took dictation from each child. This activity will be described in detail in a later section. Jill Wright read Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs and asked the children to think of something other than food that could fall from the sky. She then called the children to her table during center time to dictate their responses and to think of an appropriate name for their city. The name of the city in the book is Chewandswallow.

Although all three of the teachers mentioned above took dictation from their children, the amount of student involvement varied from situation to situation. In Ms. Shelton's class, the children told her their sentence and then watched as she wrote it. In Ms. Wright's class, the children's responses required higher order thinking because after they dictated what they wanted to fall from the sky, they completed the sentence "When people went outside, they _____," and then they created appropriate names for their cities. In Ms. Watson's class, the dictated sentence was used as decoding practice for the entire class as well as reinforcement for sentence structure and sentence type.

Writing with Sentence Starters

The use of a sentence starter is frequently used in kindergarten classrooms to prompt children's writings. Jill Wright's dictation activity described above employed a sentence starter. Candace Adams and Tamara Clark both used sentence starters in their classrooms. Tamara Clark's activity will be described in detail in a later section.

Candace Adams introduced the writing activity in her classroom through the use of a new chart. The chart was an adaptation of the popular children's song "I'm Bringing Home a Baby Bumblebee;" however, the version on the chart was "I'm Bringing Home a Baby Dinosaur":

After singing the song the first time, Ms. Adams asked, "You want to sing it one more time? Imagine for a minute...you're taking a baby dinosaur home. What would your mom do?" The class then sang the song again.

"The next thing I want us to do is write a sentence on the board. Remember a sentence is a complete thought. I will tell you the sneaky tricky letters as we go along." The children identified the letters for her to write as she stretched the sounds to:

*As I was walking
home from school,
I saw a _____
so I _____.*

She pointed out that she had to start with a capital letter, and she modeled how to leave two fingers worth of space between the words. "'e' in 'home' is a sneaky tricky letter... 'o' (in from) is a sneaky tricky letter."

Ch: (as Ms. Adams was writing "home") home from school!

CA: How did you know?

Ch: Because that's in Dinosaur Toes.

Ms. Adams continued in the same manner. When she reached the end, she asked, "Why do we put a period?"

A child responded, "Because it's the end of the sentence."

*"Here's when your part comes in. I'm going to give you a paper. You're going to say, 'I saw a **dinosaur**' but I'm not going to tell you how to spell it. You have to listen and figure it out yourself....What could you say (that you did when you saw the dinosaur)?"*

One child suggested that they could say that they stepped on his toes. Ms. Adams responded, "You could say that or ...(gave more suggestions)....Let's look and read it one more time. If you need help, I'll be glad to help; but are we going to tell you every letter? (No!) No, you need to figure it out yourself." She instructed the children to illustrate their pictures after they had written. The assistant placed the papers on the tables, and the children went to their seats to begin.

The paper was blank except for the sentence across the top:

As I was walking home from school, I saw a

_____ so I _____.

Ms. Adams and her assistant walked around discussing with the children what they would write and helping sound out words.

Like other teachers using this kind of writing activity, Ms. Adams reinforced a number of literacy related skills. She asked the children to think creatively, she reviewed the definition of a sentence, she made them aware that letters sometimes have different

sounds, she modeled proper handwriting conventions, she reinforced beginning and ending punctuation, she read with the children, and she reinforced sound/symbol relationships for individual children as they needed it in the context of their writings.

Writing Centers

Purposes varied for the writing centers found in several classrooms. Four teachers allowed children to come and go as they pleased rather than assigning the center. Of these rooms, the only time I observed a child select the writing center was in Rachel Stegall's room. She encouraged children to go to the writing center and write either a space story or a recipe for a space snack. Three other teachers required students to go to the writing center. The activities at their centers varied considerably, however. Leah McIntire checked the bookshelf to determine who had not yet written a heart book at the writing center. The center was supplied with heart shaped books with blank pages. The children were to write whatever they wished about their hearts. Only two children had not yet written in their books, so Ms. McIntire directed them to the writing center to do so. Ms. McIntire described the two children, both boys, as "floaters" because they had difficulty sticking with an activity. Because of this she had to go to the writing center several times to encourage them to write. When they protested that they did not know how to write, she responded, "Do it anyway you like. Pretend like you can spell...anyway you want to do it. It's your book. When I look at it, I won't say, 'Oh, no. It's wrong!' When you get through, if you'd like, you can read it to me."

On the chalkboard in Stephanie Woods' writing center were the words sat, cat, fat, hat, and bat. She described her writing center to me:

In writing, there's always something different. We were practicing first names, so they had to find their name on little cards I have made. They had to write their name, and I've also had some sand or salt so they could practice their alphabet and their numbers. And now we're getting into where they want to discriminate with two-letter, three-letter words.

I have some words up there right now, so they can practice writing their name first, then copy those words from the board on their little chalkboards.

Jill Wright's writing center had two Little Tike desks supplied with blank church envelopes, prescription pads, banking papers, and other materials. There was also a small mailbox with Ms. Wright's name on the outside. She explained in her interview that after Christmas she required the children to write her a note in any way they wished when they were assigned to this center. She responded to their notes later in the day.

Teachers used their writing centers to achieve a variety of objectives. In the classrooms where the center was self selected, it was an area where a child could go for such purposes as writing a note or copying words of interest to him or her. However, as stated above, there appeared to be a motivational issue involved because in three of the four classrooms no one chose that center. Ms. Stegall had made an effort to make the center sound appealing, encouraging the children to write space stories or recipes for a space snack. The space snack idea appealed to several children and they wrote recipes.

Among the classes with required writing centers, the purposes varied. In Leah McIntire's room, the children had a specific assignment, writing a heart book. In Jill Wright's classroom, the children were to write her a note; and in Stephanie Woods

classroom, writing center actually meant handwriting center because the children went there to copy words and practice name writing. Again, even in the assigned centers, motivation to write appeared to be a problem. Ms. McIntire had to encourage the two boys in her writing center several times before they actually wrote anything. In the interview, she revealed that the last time she went to speak with them her intentions were mandating rather encouraging. She told them that they could not move to another center until they had finished their books. In Jill Wright's classroom, there were activities other than writing to choose from, and the children chose the other activities. When she checked her mailbox after center time, it was empty. In Ms. Woods' room, there were also other activities available because the writing center was a part of the language and math center. Again, no one chose the writing section. Apparently, for this group of kindergarten teachers, motivating children to write in centers required more than simply making writing materials available.

Invented Spelling

Leah McIntire described the transition from dictation to invented spelling as being "a step further." Most teachers viewed invented spelling as being typical of kindergartners' writing. Those who used journal writing and several who had writing centers promoted invented spelling as a legitimate means of communicating. The teachers in this study had several names for invented spelling including inventive spelling, creative spelling, and approximations. Candace Adams spoke of her attempts to encourage one child's invented spelling:

Now one little boy--his dad wanted him to do correct spelling. He

wanted it to be correct. And I will try to wean him away from that because I don't want to tell him what it is. I want to see what he knows. However, if the (children) really want me to tell them, I am not going to break their hearts and not tell them. I'm going to tell them. But what I really want to do is see what they do know. And if I feel that it's a sneaky tricky letter (indicating a silent letter or a letter with a sound that they have not studied)...I might go ahead and tell them....

When several of the teachers spoke of invented spelling, they did so in the context of having their children write on computers as a part of the Writing to Read program. Melinda Burton explained the free writing component of that program:

They have a writing center where they can write about any of the cycle words, or they can write about something they have done during the day. They can create their own stories....Last year I had a girl that was writing..."Abraham Lincoln was our sixteenth president"....She did a whole inventive spelling and everything. And that was really good. We've got some (that write things like) "This is a cat" or "a cat" and they will draw a picture of a cat. And then (they will write) "This is a dog"....

In summary, the use of invented spelling was accepted in most of the classrooms in this study. Although some teachers did not mention it, those who did indicated that it was simply what kindergartners do. The three teachers who utilized journal writing encouraged children to use invented spellings if they wished; however, based on my

observations, most of the children chose to copy print instead. Asking children to use invented spelling was seen as a method of assessing what the children knew according to Candace Adams. Both she and Tamara Clark provided activities that required the children to use invented spellings in their writings. In both classrooms, the teachers and the assistants rotated among the children, constantly providing assistance as needed. Two teachers indicated that they took dictation from the children until they had covered all of the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, afterwards requiring the children to use invented spelling instead.

Handwriting Instruction

Handwriting instruction is not commonly found in kindergarten classrooms. Reading readiness advocates do not believe children's fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination are sufficiently developed to warrant such instruction. Emergent literacy supporters feel that handwriting instruction should be integrated into creative/informational writing, and therefore, do not provide isolated instruction in this area. However, teaching children to write their names is generally favored in kindergarten classrooms of all sorts due not only to the convenience of having children write their own names on projects and papers, but also because children's names represent the epitome of "meaningful" print. Although not as common as name writing, many teachers guided children in letter formation, usually as they introduced each letter. These activities were described earlier in the section on "Other Alphabet Activities." Additionally, it is widely accepted in all types of early childhood classes that it is beneficial to help children develop fine motor control through such activities as drawing, coloring, cutting, and tracing. This

portion of the report describes activities in the classrooms of this study that relate to handwriting instruction. Sections include name writing, copying, and fine motor development activities.

Name Writing

All of the teachers in this study expected children to write their names on their papers for themselves. Frequent reminders were heard to "Remember to write your name on your paper." Most of the duplicated papers given to the children to complete provided a line at the top designated for the name. Jill Wright reminded her students to leave two fingers width of space between their first and last names. In Leah McIntire's classroom there was a very large red heart on one of the bulletin boards. The children had all painted their names with white paint on the heart. Ms. McIntire said she liked it because it was an instant bulletin board, and the children got to practice their names at the same time.

Four teachers provided name writing practice through a procedure they called "signing in." Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Kathy Watson, and Jill Wright had children "sign in" when they first arrived in the classroom. Kathy Watson provided a large ringed binder for signing in. There were pages for each day beginning on the first day of the year in the binder. The pages had lines approximately one inch apart. The children signed their names on the lines. Jill Wright used the two Little Tike desks in her writing center for signing in. The boys signed in on one, and the girls signed in on the other.

Candace Adams and Tamara Clark had the children sign their names as a "vote" on issues related to the current classroom theme. The children in Ms. Adams' room signed a poster divided into two sections to indicate if they believed dinosaurs were "drab colors"

or "bright colors." In Ms. Clark's classroom, a picture from a newspaper with the headline "Big Frogs Make Big News" was at the top of a posterboard that was divided into a "Yes" section and a "No" section. Below the newspaper clipping was a sentence strip with the question "Should the giant frogs enter the contest?" Children indicated their feelings by voting yes or no. Ms. Clark had two additional "signing in" procedures occurring simultaneously with the voting process. Children pulled cards with their street addresses from a pocket chart and copied them into the sign-in book. They also could sign up for a center if they chose to do so. One child in this classroom had the honor of signing his name on the April tooth chart to show that he had lost a tooth during the month.

In summary, most of the classrooms in this study did not emphasize correct letter formation or place a great deal of value on neatness in writing. Name writing was the primary tool for teaching children letter formation. All of the teachers had children write their names on papers and projects. Four teachers had signing in procedures, two of which were theme-related "voting" procedures.

Copying

As mentioned in the section on writing centers, Stephanie Woods had a copying exercise in her writing center. In several other centers there were theme related words, sentence starters, and other words such as color words that children could copy. Also, mentioned under the section on journal writing was the observation that both Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson allowed children to copy print into their journals as long as they could read what they had written. In Ms. Clark's room, all of the children writing in journals chose to copy print from familiar books. Ms. Watson's children all copied the

sentence starter "I see _____," with one child filling in several color words along with a square of that color beside it. Melinda Burton's children sometimes copied a mystery sentence into their journals adding other words and sentences if they chose to do so.

In Rachel Stegall's class, when the children were working on a rocket picture to be displayed in the hall for the new Space unit, one child asked if they could copy the words "Blast off" onto their pictures. These words were over a large cutout of a rocket displayed on the door of the classroom. Ms. Stegall told them they could copy the words if they wished.

Several of Lisa Cook's children finished the back cover of a individually constructed book on the life cycle of a butterfly during center time. The last activity of the day was to share those books with each other. On each page was the appropriate label such as "egg, caterpillar, chrysalis or cocoon, and butterfly." Ms. Cook explained in her interview that the children had copied the words from the chalkboard.

In most of the classes observed, copying print was an optional activity either in a center, as part of journal writing, or as part of an art/craft project. Lisa Cook was the only teacher who required her children to copy print from the chalkboard.

Fine Motor Development Activities

Activities such as drawing, cutting, tracing, and coloring were seen in each classroom. This type of activity was popular as an early morning exercise that the children could begin as they arrived and waited for school to begin. In Sarah Harper's room, the children had a paper with a maze on each side to work on before 8:00 a.m. Candace Adams had a coloring sheet with three dinosaurs pictured on it. The dinosaurs were

drawn with dashed lines, and the directions were to trace the lines before coloring the picture. Kathy Watson's children found Easter eggs hidden in a picture and colored them. Several other teachers asked children to draw pictures and then color them. Activities such as these are viewed as helping develop children's fine motor abilities.

Summary of Writing Instruction

The data of this study show that teachers planned a variety of writing activities for their children. They sometimes took dictation from the entire class in the form of group stories, experience charts, and lesson content reviews; and they sometimes required children to write independently. Independent writing activities included journal writing, dictation, writing with sentence starters, and writing in centers. A practice common to all these activities was that most of the teachers asked the children to read back their writings, reinforcing the concept that print has meaning and that it can be used to communicate with others.

Some teachers took dictation from their children while others encouraged the use of invented spelling. As seen in this study, activities designed to have children use invented spelling afforded teachers abundant opportunity to reinforce sound/symbol relationships. Ball and Blachman (1991) found that phoneme awareness training promotes early reading and spelling skills. Although Ball and Blachman's methods of training isolated the practice and provided decontextualized drill, the teachers in this study who asked their children to write using invented spelling appeared to accomplish the same purposes but within the context of meaningful print. They provided a model of segmenting phonemes by stretching words that children were attempting to write and gave

assistance in matching the appropriate letter to each sound. Children in these classrooms were encouraged to help each other as well, which is supported by Cannella's (1991) findings that social interaction during writing enhanced invented spelling. Helping children become better invented spellers was found to help those children become better word learners (Richgels, 1995).

Handwriting skills were mainly modeled by teachers as they took dictation either for the entire group or for individuals; however, all children were expected to write their own names. Kathy Watson, as described under "Other Alphabet Activities," was the only teacher to indicate that she taught a formal handwriting lesson each week. Although others provided fine motor development activities and required children to frequently write their names, the only other handwriting type activity mentioned was the letter formation instruction also described under "Other Alphabet Activities" that involved teaching children the strokes of each letter and allowing them to practice on salt trays, on individual chalkboards, and in the air with their "magic fingers."

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: INFLUENCES ON LITERACY INSTRUCTION

The present study was guided by two research questions. The second, "What influences the literacy instruction of kindergarten teachers?" is the subject of this chapter. Described here are the teachers' perceptions of what influences their literacy instruction. The influences fell into three categories: (a) curriculum influences, (b) personal philosophy influences, and (c) time influences. A separate section is devoted to each type of influence.

CURRICULUM INFLUENCES

Curriculum influences include system level constraints and resources available. System level constraints refer to requirements such as the report card, the state mandated curriculum guide, and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT). The teachers refer to the curriculum guide as the "blue book;" therefore, I will refer to it in like manner. Curriculum influences also encompass the various resources available to the teacher in planning and implementing literacy instruction. Examples include the school library and the AlphaTime program discussed in Chapter 4.

System Level Constraints

School systems commonly mandate that specific skills be taught at each grade level. Normally, there are state mandated skills and system level mandated skills. Oftentimes, there is a good deal of overlap between the two lists of required skills. An examination of the specified language arts skills in the blue book and on the kindergarten report card for the Vicksburg schools revealed that many of the skills listed were identical

or similar in nature. There were items unique to both lists, however. For example, two skills in the blue book but not on the report card were: (a) Ask questions and (b) Listen to simple stories and retell. Two skills were also listed under "Writing Readiness" that were not addressed on the report card: (a) Recognize that everyone has experiences to write about and (b) Recognize that writing can entertain and inform. Writing readiness, other than the mechanical skills of handwriting (e.g. "Hold pencil correctly"), were not addressed on the report card.

Examples of skills listed on the report card under the heading of "Language Arts Readiness" and not in the blue book were: (a) Complete given sentences with words that make sense from context clues; (b) Discriminate two to three letter words; (c) Skill in recognizing consonant sounds; (d) Draw conclusions; (e) Determine cause and effect; (f) Distinguish between reality/fantasy; and (g) Make appropriate judgments.

A third system level constraint on the curriculum was the mandated Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) given to all kindergarten students each spring. Teachers consistently cited all three documents as influences in their planning. The following sections deal with each of these influences.

Blue Book

Karen Anderson and Tamara Clark referred to the blue book as their "Bible." The "Preface" to the blue book states that it was to be used as a guideline to indicate basic skills at each grade level (K-8). Skills are listed by subject area and are intended to provide a scope and sequence for kindergarten through eighth grade education. Eleven of the 14 teachers interviewed referred to the blue book in some fashion. Several teachers

called the state guidelines "basic skills" rather than the blue book. Sarah Harper clarified the contradiction in terms:

I: Okay. We've mentioned the blue book a couple of times.

Would you just tell me what the blue book is and how it influences your planning?

SH It is the (STATE)...I guess you'd call it the basic skills. It is not really "basic skills," 'cause they have kind of done away with that. But it's a list of objectives that they want a kindergartner to know in the areas of language, reading, math, science, social studies, computer, and art....

I: So, it is what they want you to teach--the state--wants you to teach before they go to the next grade level?

SH: It's a list of objectives.

I: ...I guess I was confusing basic skills (with the blue book), I thought that was basic skills.

SH: No, "basic skills" has been done away with. There is no test for this now. You make up your own criteria for grading, and a lot of times it's judgmental....

Melinda Burton described the blue book as "the things we have to teach." Most of the other teachers seemed to concur with this description, referring to "covering the basic skills" or talking about the difficulty of "doing all of them." Leah McIntire was the only teacher to say that she did not use the blue book, although she did say that she

looked at it to see what the state wanted her to teach. Most of the teachers in this study indicated that they relied heavily upon the "blue book," the state mandated curriculum guide, to guide their planning. Two teachers even referred to it as their "Bible."

This influence became even more evident as the skills listed in the blue book were examined and compared to the teachers' instructional practices. Many of the literacy activities observed in the classroom were related to one or more of the skills. For example, one of the skills listed under the heading, "Mechanics," is: "Recognize own name when printed." As noted in the previous chapter, several teachers began each day by having children find their names on cards and place them in pockets, baskets, or pocket charts. Another example is the skill listed as "Ask questions." Carrie Dotson had an activity that she called the "Yes/No Box." Inside the box was a hidden object. The children had to ask questions that could be answered with "yes" or "no" to determine what the object was. A final example is the skill "Make and describe observations." Stephanie Woods had a stack of "Bean Journals" on her science table--one for each child. When I questioned her about them, she replied that they were part of an activity designed to assess this skill. The class had planted bean seeds in plastic containers and was waiting for them to grow. Periodically, Ms. Woods, or her assistant, would call the children to the science table and ask them to look at the containers and state what they saw. Their responses were recorded in the "Bean Journals." Finally, as discussed previously, every teacher repeatedly addressed the skill listed as "Recognize and name letters of the alphabet." Apparently, this group of teachers created literacy related activities that allowed them to evaluate skills listed in the blue book.

Report Card

Kindergarten report cards were distributed to students at the end of the second, third, fourth, and sixth grading periods. Teachers held conferences with parents at the completion of the first and fifth grading periods. Teachers assessed children's performance on the skills listed with an "X" indicating "Has developed skill," a "/" indicating "Is developing skill," or an "N" indicating "Needs help." Sarah Harper explained the grading system on the kindergarten report card in this manner: "... 'X' means mastery, and a slash means they are in the process of learning, and a 'N' means 'has no clue'...."

Eleven of the 14 teachers interviewed cited the report card as an important influence on their instruction. Several of these reported that when they first began teaching kindergarten, the report card was one of the first things they looked at to determine what needed to be taught. Others talked about the report card requiring more skills than did the blue book. Two teachers had interesting comments about the report card that indicates differing levels of influence. Julie Shelton explained:

It is just that you're required to teach it (referring to the report card).

You know, that is what they need to know in order to succeed and go on to first....And then we used to have to label everything (in the room). We don't anymore...it was on our report card. Now, it is not....

They took it off the report card, so we don't do it anymore....I don't know the rationale behind it. I don't know the rationale behind them taking it off either....

Kathy Watson, on the other hand, said, "And I have been known to change a report card, with permission from my principal, if it did not go along with the way I was doing it (referring to teaching certain skills such as letter recognition)."

Another example of the influence was seen in a comment made by Stephanie Woods about her writing center when she said, "...and now that they are discriminating two to three letter words..." That statement appeared to mean that her students had by that time of the year progressed to the point of being proficient enough in sound/symbol relationships that they could sound out two or three letter words. However, upon examination of the report card, it became clear that she was citing a skill almost verbatim from the report card.

To summarize data related to report cards, I found they had a significant influence on most of the teachers. They stated that they looked at it in order to know what they should teach. That influence, however, varied in its intensity. On the one hand, Julie Shelton appeared to believe that the report card defined the kindergarten experience even to the point of eliminating labeling classroom objects (a practice found in every other classroom) when it was taken off the report card. Kathy Watson, on the other hand, determined to change the report card if it did not fit what she felt her students needed.

Metropolitan Readiness Test

The MRT was a "hot" topic during my visits to the classrooms. Several teachers mentioned meetings with Elizabeth Mason, their new supervisor, that centered around whether or not to continue administering the exam to kindergarten students. Objections ranged from inappropriate content to extreme pressure on the children. Following are

some of the opinions expressed by three teachers about the MRT. These represent comments shared by several other teachers in the study:

Tamara Clark

But the things on the Metropolitan...they don't fit our blue book, and they do not fit our kindergarten check list (report card), so I don't know why we give it. But I think I foresee, within the next year, we will be using that money towards an appropriate developmental screening that tells us more about the child and less about how well they can take a test, or how well they can guess. So, I feel like we will be getting rid of the Metropolitan within the next year.

Sarah Harper

I: Well, talk to me about your reasons for doing the blends.

SH: The reason for doing the blends. Real simple. It is one thing that is on that Metropolitan, which I think is...not meant for kindergarten; it is not the way you teach in kindergarten. But, we have to give it, they say, because it has always been done. And (blends are) on there...and I just want to prepare my kids to (perform to) the best of their ability. That's the only reason I can tell you.

I: Okay. One of my questions coming up is about the Metropolitan. What do you see as the purpose of that test,

and how does it influence your teaching? You've given one example.

SH: It does not really influence my teaching one way or the other.
I feel that it does not cover the way that we teach in kindergarten....
I think it is wrong to ask a kindergarten kid to do that.... There are some teachers who use it as a means to keep (students) in kindergarten another year. I disagree with that because it does not go along with the report card...(or) the blue book.... To me it's wrong to say, "Okay, this kid did not score 37%, put (him) in kindergarten another year or put (him) in a Junior First. I disagree with that.

Leah McIntire

I: ...You mentioned the Metropolitan Test in April. Do you find that that test influences your teaching at all?

LM: Yes. Yes. To be honest.

I: Would you expand?

LM: Let me say, I hate it...there is nothing about that test situation that approximates what we do during the entire kindergarten year. And then we require a child to sit down and make a mark on a book. We can't talk about it. I can't help them. They can't help each other. They can't even look at each others' (tests). So, we're like a little barricade in here for that week. I've got

books around us; I've got cardboard pieces. They look at me.

They cry. I have some really strong feelings about doing it.

However, our system put it in to have a benchmark to decide which children need to go to our readiness, or our Junior First classes. And also, to have something specific to say to parents about what kind of progress the child has made. And there is some argument for doing it that way. We are re-looking at it to see if there is something better out there, or if we need the Metropolitan....As we approach it, I will do more pencil and paper work. I will do more of the type things where you put a mark from corner to corner in a square.

With the exception of Stephanie Woods, who noted that it "does help us decide the placing of children who are working below grade level," most of the teachers expressed a dislike for the MRT. The most frequently cited concern was that it was so difficult that it made the children cry. Several teachers talked about the test not fitting their philosophy of how kindergarten should be taught. Interestingly, Sarah Harper and Leah McIntire made very similar statements in regard to the MRT. Sarah Harper said, "It is not the way you teach in kindergarten...." Leah McIntire commented, "There is nothing about that test situation that approximates what we do during the entire kindergarten year...." Although the statements were almost identical, the meanings behind them were quite different. Leah McIntire, along with a number of others, felt that since kindergarten was experience based, or "hands-on," assessing children with a paper and pencil tool was

unfair. Sarah Harper, along with Julie Shelton, was expressing concern stemming from the fact that the exam did not coincide with the skills that were required on the report card.

Almost every teacher cited at least one way the MRT influenced her planning for literacy instruction. Candace Adams gave following directions papers to assist her children in developing listening skills for the test. Karen Anderson tried to complete her instruction on the alphabet before the MRT and stated that she withheld instruction on rhyming words until after the test to help the children concentrate on initial sounds as tested on the MRT instead of the ending sounds they heard in rhyming words. Melinda Burton waited to begin the Writing to Read program to avoid undue pressure and distraction from preparation for the exam. Lisa Cook had certain words such as "women" that she emphasized with the children because she felt those words were unfamiliar to the children, and they were used on the MRT. Carrie Dotson gave more dittos to help her children learn to transfer knowledge to paper. A number of teachers indicated that they increased the amount of worksheets they gave to the children and taught lessons on initial blends prior to the exam even though they thought the skill was too difficult for kindergarten children.

Monique Walker said that she did not know how to judge if the MRT influenced her teaching because in 17 years of teaching she had given it every year. Only two teachers said that they had not allowed the MRT to influence their instruction. Tamara Clark said that she had not concentrated on anything in particular for the MRT because she felt that her principal and Elizabeth Mason were not pressuring the teachers to have

their students perform well on it. She said, "And I am not willing to give up anything in my day for (the Metropolitan)...." Similarly, in an informal interview, Kathy Watson said that she had not worried about the MRT, but expressed some concern that the parents of her children might be upset if their children did not perform well on it.

Resources

When asked how she decided what to do when she first began teaching kindergarten, Carrie Dotson indicated that her decisions were based primarily on the resources available in her classroom. She said, "A lot of it (what you do) is influenced by what materials they give you...." She explained that she left teaching for 10 years after her children were born and then returned to the classroom. About that occasion, she said, "When I came back to this school, I was very much influenced then by what materials I had in the room."

Leah McIntire concurred with the influence that resources have on a teacher's instruction when she stated, "You find that not everyone has the same resources, so you have to adapt what you are doing to what is available in the school...." This section of the report discusses the resources most frequently cited by the Vicksburg kindergarten teachers and explains the influence of those resources on their literacy instruction.

Assistants

All of the teachers in this study had assistants who stayed with them while the children were present. After the children were dismissed, the assistants left to work with higher grade teachers. The assistants were an integral part of each classroom. Although they primarily handled the clerical and cleanup duties and helped prepare materials, most

of them were involved in instruction during some part of the day. In the majority of the classrooms, the assistants were in charge of a particular center, usually the art center. They instructed the children who came to their table about the procedure and assisted as was necessary. In Candace Adams' and Tamara Clark's rooms, the teachers and assistants rotated among the children helping them decide what to write and stretching sounds for them. Sarah Harper's assistant took charge of the Animal Island instructional activity and read the children a book after lunch. In Jill Wright's room, her assistant not only monitored a center in which she completed a comprehension worksheet and played a letter sounds game with small groups, she led the children in the opening. The opening included discussing the calendar, the weather, and counting the number of children present.

While most of the assistants, with the exception of those in Ms. Adams', Ms. Clark's, and Ms. Wright's rooms, were not directly involved in literacy instruction, they served a vital function in freeing the teachers to begin working with the children as soon as they arrived. As noted in the descriptions of literacy instruction, in many classrooms, literacy related activities began immediately and included such activities as interacting with children about books they were viewing or assisting them in signing in. Because the assistants were in charge of such duties as recording attendance and taking lunch money, the teachers were available to begin their instruction much earlier.

AlphaTime

The manner in which AlphaTime was used in the classrooms was discussed at length in the "Reading" section of the previous chapter. Opinions varied as to whether or not the use of AlphaTime was required. Obviously, Kathy Watson did not believe it was

required because she did not use the program. The following statements are illustrative of comments on the subject. Candace Adams and Tamara Clark said that although it had been required in the past, it was no longer required. Karen Anderson, on the other hand, believed that it was required.

Leah McIntire shed some interesting insight upon the reasons behind the decision to purchase AlphaTime for each kindergarten classroom:

A few years back,...as the lesser of several evils, when someone started saying "What is your language program...?" You know, people always want you to quote a kit, a program, an organized type thing, implying that you can't teach this any other way. Rather than get into readiness, or kindergarten level textbook programs, we decided we'd do AlphaTime....That is, we say in our system, is part of what we use as our language arts program. But we are not required to use it. We have it, but if you have something you think works better, you can (use it instead)....Because we were being pressured to look at textbook readiness programs and we didn't want that, (we purchased AlphaTime)....

The materials available in a classroom influenced the instruction of that classroom. In no case was this influence more evident than with AlphaTime. Since AlphaTime was available in each of these classrooms, teachers used it, especially those who believed they were required to do so. The fact that nothing else was available may have also influenced the teachers to use AlphaTime. Carrie Dotson made this observation:

I: Are you required to use AlphaTime?

CD: Pretty much so. We've changed supervisors at this point in the year, so I'm not sure that would be the case now. If you don't use AlphaTime, you have no money to get anything else,...but then I don't know if this (AlphaTime) is the best or not, because I've not seen another one. It's okay with me, and I can live with it....

Ms. Dotson's comments illustrate the influence of having AlphaTime in every classroom:

(a) Teachers assumed that it was required; (b) It was the only program available for teaching both the letter names and their sounds; (c) Funds were not available for purchasing alternative programs; and (d) Teachers were unaware of other programs.

School Library

Most teachers in this study referred to their school libraries as sources of books for their reading centers and theme-based units. Candace Adams indicated that she typically bought her own books because her library lacked books appropriate for kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers in her school had broached the subject with the librarian who was willing to remedy the situation. Several teachers stated that they looked for books with large illustrations and limited text on each page and were concerned about the lack of such books available to them.

Leah McIntire, on the other hand, had this to say about her school library:

Our library is the best anywhere. Unbelievable resources....Some units will go one week, some two. And if I don't have a lot of material (implying material from the library) on something we may not go a whole week.

Mostly one or two weeks....

As inferred in this statement, teachers felt that certain resources, especially appropriate books, were necessary in order to plan and implement thematic units. The primary source of those resources for most teachers was the school library. Therefore, if the library did not have adequate resources, their instruction was impeded.

Computers

Four of the six schools in this study had IBM's Writing to Read program which was described in the previous chapter. The two schools that did not have it chose not to order it. These two schools serviced primarily middle class children. Some of the other schools received the program through Title I moneys because they serve large populations of economically deprived students.

Several teachers did not appear to be significantly influenced by the presence of computers in their classrooms or at their disposal in a computer lab. Lisa Cook and Leah McIntire did not mention the computers at all, although Ms. Cook did allow children to use the computers to play games during center time. Leah McIntire did not have computers in her room; however, I discovered later from the other teacher in her school that they each have the school's computer lab at their disposal for one hour per day.

Among the other teachers, opinions concerning computers were mixed. Julie Shelton felt it was beneficial for some students:

We have the IBM Writing to Read program....It's next door in the computer room, and I have kind of gotten out of it. It is good for the children who know their alphabet. It is real good. But the ones who don't are lost. I just kind of slowed down on that, and after this readiness

test (MRT) we're going to give, I am going to start again....One mother said (that) her little girl is missing it, because she knows all the alphabet and she is ready to roll. And so I do plan to (get back to it)....

Carrie Dotson, Karen Anderson, and Monique Walker expressed misgivings about the usefulness of Writing to Read in their situation. Carrie Dotson explained that the program specified that each classroom should have not less than eight computers in order to use the program as intended. In her school, the eight computers had been split between her room and the other kindergarten room making it impossible to use the cycles described in the program. She opted to use the program as a center activity. She also recently gained access to many more software programs, including a program entitled "Stories and More," which she liked as much as Writing to Read. She was not using the Writing to Read program the day I observed her classroom.

Karen Anderson and Monique Walker worked in a school that had piloted a whole language program for one year in 1989-1990, six years prior to this study. Because of having Writing to Read in their classrooms and feeling constrained to use the program for an hour each day, they no longer felt they had time for the whole language techniques they had enjoyed. They virtually looked upon their whole language days as "the good ol' days." Monique Walker was describing a dictation activity that she had done in the past with The Mitten by Jan Brett, when she stopped to explain:

MW: Of course, now, when we are doing Writing to Read, we don't have time to do the things like that, that we would like to do.
(chuckle) Okay?

I: Okay. So, Writing to Read has kind of pushed that out?

MW: Taking all our time

I: So, do you feel like you are getting the same sort of benefits from Writing to Read?

MW: I feel like you are...different (benefits). Not the same. I mean if I had to choose, I would lose Writing to Read, and go back to the things...because we don't have time to do the developmental things that we should be doing. Used to, we could take time and show them how to build houses, and help them do more things with manners...There are just so many things that we don't have time to do now, because we feel like we have to do this (Writing to Read).

I: Do you feel like you have to because someone told you that you have to do it?

MW: Yeah. Yeah, basically that's it. (laughter)....

Karen Anderson had her doubts that her children should be working on computers at this stage of their development:

We've got kids that...they don't need to be on those computers. They still hardly know they are in the world, let alone, what they are doing on something like that....For those (children), it is just an exploration activity. That's basically it for them....We are a whole language...we piloted whole language. We've had to get away from that.

Sarah Harper's classroom has been designated as a computer demonstration classroom. As such, she received a number of computers to use with her children. She explained how the computers had influenced her teaching:

I don't know if it has really changed any way that I teach other than it reinforces...the games I ordered for the computers and all. When we went to training, (my assistant) and I previewed a lot of stuff that would reinforce what I do in the classroom. To me, it taught...Well, I know last year's bunch--some of them that did not read right away--caught on to reading real quick because they saw words highlighted.... They began to pick up that word or they recognized (words) a whole lot faster....I just more or less use it to reinforce what I've done in the classroom. I have not turned everything over to the computers. You know, I feel like this age group needs a little bit more structure. I mainly use it when we go to centers.

In summary, although teachers appeared to enjoy having access to games on the computers, several of them expressed concern that kindergarten was too early to be using computers for literacy instruction in programs such as Writing to Read. An additional concern was the amount of time required to implement the Writing to Read program as it was designed. Most of the teachers handled the problem by simply not doing it or modifying it to fit their schedules. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker, however, felt constrained to use the program in its entirety and give up other activities instead.

Wright Group Materials

The Wright Group is a company that publishes whole language materials, especially big books and smaller versions of the same stories. All of the books in a certain series have similar covers. The company is well known among whole language supporters for their materials and for their conferences. Their materials are geared for certain age levels. The materials for the kindergarten level are very predictable. Many of the books for this age group are written by Joy Cowley.

All five teachers who stated that they were trying to "do whole language" (Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, Kathy Watson, and Jill Wright) used Wright Group materials and found them beneficial. I asked Candace Adams about the appeal of these materials:

A lot of (the appeal) is the repetition. Because they need that, and they feel comfortable with that. They love (the ones set to music). If they don't know any other author, they know Joy Cowley. And they think that every author is Joy Cowley....They have learned to recognize that certain books are Wright Group books, and they'll say, "Did Joy Cowley write it?"...She has a lot of repetition, and a lot of things have a neat beat to them...and even if it doesn't have the music, there is a rhythm to it. Also, most of it is age appropriate, and the pictures are usually very exciting to them. I can take those (books) and change it and make it something else (indicating writing an adaptation of the story with the children)....(With The Jigaree), we came up with as many high energy

words as we could, and we talked about "These are action words...."

We had a paper with the Jigaree on it, and it said, "I could see a Jigaree.

It is ____ after me." They had to come up with their own action word and show themselves doing that action on that page.

Rachel Stegall reported that her children thought that every author was Joy Cowley as well. Tamara Clark described the materials as being "on top" for kindergarten.

Sarah Harper, who did not specify that she used any whole language techniques, had purchased a set of the books as well. She had this to say about them:

I: I noticed that you have a lot of the Wright Group...

SH: I ordered a series of those. And then when I do letters, if it has that letter in the story, like The Tall Toe or something like that, I'll use that with Mr. T.... You know and read to them and things like that.

I: And then after you read it?

SH: I just put it over there and let the kids look at it for a few days. And we clear it off...

I: I wanted to ask you why you ordered the Wright Group books? What attracted you to them?

SH: I guess the pictures, and there was not a lot of words on each page. I had heard other people say they were really good books to use, and I was looking for something. I would love to have the big books, but of course, they are way too expensive. Even the small ones are too expensive for me, for what you get....But,

they are good. The kids like them.

While Melinda Burton, Carrie Dotson, and Leah McIntire mentioned that they liked whole language, or used it at times, they did not mention the Wright Group and no Wright Group materials were available in their rooms at the time of the observations.

The appeal of the Wright Group books to the teachers attempting whole language was evident. I saw lessons based on Wright Group books in Candace Adams' classroom, Tamara Clark's classroom, and Rachel Stegall's classroom. There were also Wright Group books on the bookshelves in all these rooms and in Kathy Watson's room. Although the books were available in Sarah Harper's room, they did not appear to appeal to her in the same ways as the other teachers.

Professional Journals/Resource Books

Every teacher interviewed mentioned that they read or used professional materials. The most frequently cited resource was the Preschool/Kindergarten edition of Mailbox magazine. Candace Adams called this publication her "secondary Bible." Only one teacher, Tamara Clark, mentioned a professional journal, Young Children, as a resource. A number of different titles of books especially on the topic of whole language were mentioned by the teachers interested in that approach. The only title mentioned more than once was Joyful Learning by Bobbi Fisher. Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, and Kathy Watson had all read that book. Tamara Clark stated that she relied on it heavily during her first year as a kindergarten teacher. Stephanie Woods had purchased several teacher idea books mostly related to literature based reading. Julie Shelton and Carrie Dotson mentioned student teachers as sources for new activities for their classrooms.

Other than Mailbox magazine, no one publication was read by a significant number of teachers. None of them referred to research journals in early childhood education. From this observation, it would seem that Troyer and Yopp (1990) expressed a valid concern about the timely dissemination of research to practicing teachers.

Summary of Curriculum Influences

Regardless of their perspectives toward literacy instruction, there were certain materials that heavily influenced each teacher's instructional practice. The most influential were those they felt constrained to use by the school system, namely the blue book, the report card, and the MRT. Some teachers seemed to look to these sources for guidance in their planning while others resisted their influence and acted instead according to what they perceived the needs of their children to be. A few even seemed to define the kindergarten experience according to these influences.

The only two resources available in every classroom were an assistant teacher and the AlphaTime program. School libraries were available to every teacher but utilized to varying degrees based upon the resources available. Reliance on two other resources, computers and the Wright Group materials, seemed to be indicative to some extent of the perspective of the teachers. It was evident that most of the teachers who expressed a strong interest in whole language techniques relied heavily on the Wright Group materials to the point of being willing to purchase the books in spite of prohibitive cost. Exceptions to this were Jill Wright and Leah McIntire. However, as mentioned earlier, Leah McIntire relied much more on the writing aspect of the whole language approach than on the

reading component. She found big books awkward and did not see a purpose for multiple copies of the same title.

Analyzing the effect of the computers based on teacher perspective is more complex. Rather than being based on perspective in the sense of literacy instruction, utilization of computer programs seemed more closely related to the teachers' perspectives concerning their own autonomy in the classroom. The two teachers who seemed the most comfortable with the curriculum they had designed for their classrooms over the years, Lisa Cook and Leah McIntire, did not even mention the computers, indicating that they were not heavily influenced by them. Interestingly, both of these teachers indicated in their interviews that they had always enjoyed the freedom of kindergarten teaching especially the freedom from mandated textbooks and the freedom to adapt materials as one saw fit. They appeared to feel very autonomous in their classrooms.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were two teachers who seemed to feel little autonomy. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker indicated that they were constrained to use the Writing to Read program even though they both felt it was developmentally inappropriate for many of their students. Both teachers had been in the same school for their entire kindergarten careers; and as Ms. Anderson pointed out, that school changed principals quite frequently. She jokingly said that they had had to learn to be very flexible. However, a close look at the data indicated the opposite. They seemed to rely on programmed materials to a greater extent than the other teachers and adapted those materials to a lesser extent. The use of the Writing to Read program is one example as is the evidence that they followed the AlphaTime program more closely than the other

teachers in the study. One further indication that these two teachers were heavily influenced by programmed materials was revealed when they spoke of the past. More than any other teachers, they referenced programs when talking about their instruction. Karen Anderson relayed the history of her kindergarten teaching career by enumerating the various programs she had used over the years. Both teachers spoke of whole language in terms of a program that they had piloted for one year. While they had enjoyed that "program" more than the one they were currently using, they had moved on and as Karen Anderson put it, "Whole language started phasing out for us with the computers." These two teachers, for reasons impossible to fully understand given the scope of this study, felt little autonomy.

Materials significantly influenced each teacher's literacy instruction. Their personal philosophies of what kindergarten literacy instruction should look like influenced the materials they chose, the importance they placed on materials, and the extent to which they adapted them to fit their own needs. It is to these philosophies that I now turn.

PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY INFLUENCES

As discussed in the previous section, teachers are influenced in their literacy instruction by the curriculum they are expected to teach. The curriculum includes constraints mandated by the system in the forms of curriculum guides, report cards, and standardized tests as well as materials available to the teachers through the school and through their own resources. These influences are somewhat uniform in nature, applying to all teachers. This section deals with influences that are unique to each person.

Instruction, literacy or otherwise, is influenced by a teacher's style of teaching. Developing a teaching style is an idiosyncratic process which in analyzing the data from this study appeared to be based largely on a teacher's beliefs about students' needs, her experiences, and her personal viewpoints of teaching. These three areas are so closely interwoven that I found it difficult to separate them in many cases. However, I have separated this discussion into three sections based on these constructs. The first section describes what teachers had to say about the needs of their students; the second section describes their experiences; and the third section deals with their personal viewpoints on teaching kindergarten.

Kindergarten Students' Needs

Throughout the interviews, teachers referred to three topics in reference to their perceived notions of children's needs: (a) a curriculum conducive to the level of development of kindergarten children; (b) a healthy self concept; and (c) preparation for first grade. Each of these needs is discussed in the following pages.

Developmental Curriculum/Hands-On Instruction

Teachers viewed the kindergarten curriculum as different from that in the higher elementary grades, referring to it as "developmental" or "hands-on." Melinda Burton referred to manipulative games and objects as "hands-on" materials and referred to them as "what kindergarten is all about." Stephanie Woods related that she was attempting to construct and collect enough games and other manipulative objects to make her classroom "total(ly) hands-on." In speaking of her concerns about the kindergarten experience, Jill Wright said:

In kindergarten we try to do things in small groups or individually....
It's more hands on (than first grade). The children experience it in kindergarten for themselves, and it is really a fun way to learn....I still believe that young children should be children. And I feel like they're losing out with a lot with paper/pencil activities. I like to work with concrete things--especially at the beginning of the year, before Christmas--so children can discover for themselves. It will be much more meaningful to them, if they discover it themselves....I like a hands on approach.

Leah McIntire concurred with this view of the kindergarten experience:

My philosophy is that you have to get down on their level; it has to be motivational; that children learn through play; through making choices; that play is their work; that...I think that they still learn experientially, with hands-on type activities.

All of the classes observed had a portion of the day designated as center time when the children could go to an area of the room and choose from among different activities. In some classrooms, the children selected their own center; in others, the teacher assigned the centers. Although every teacher did not specifically refer to "hands-on" teaching, center time would seem to indicate that they believed it to be of some merit.

In the quote from Jill Wright above, her reference to pencil/paper activities seems to imply that she saw those activities in conflict with hands-on activities. Several teachers referred to the same idea in talking about "fighting against" paper/pencil activities in kindergarten. Sarah Harper, as has been documented throughout this paper, did not agree

with this evaluation of the usefulness of paper/pencil activities. In comparing herself to other kindergarten teachers, she said:

I see some of the others that do not do any dittos at all....I see advantages to that, but I also see disadvantages, because to me, those children are going to have a hard time settling down into first grade. That's my personal opinion.

Later in the interview, Ms. Harper referred to software that required the child to manipulate either a joystick or a mouse as "hands-on" indicating that she might have a broader definition for that term than it has been utilized here.

Several teachers did not refer to "hands-on" learning specifically, but seemed to be in agreement with the concept based on their comments about the stages, or levels, of the children they taught. Their comments centered around skills that they did not think should be required of kindergarten students because the children were not "ready" for them and comments about what they perceived to be a "push down" of the curriculum.

Candace Adams spoke of a list of sight words that the first grade teachers in her school wanted the kindergarten children to learn as "first grade words." She commented that not every children is "ready for first grade words." Melinda Burton said that some of her students were "not at the stage" to sound out words. She also reported that the developmental level of her children at different points in the year was influential in her planning. She said that she asked herself "Where are they? and What are they ready for?" when making decisions about activities for the classroom. Specifically, she mentioned that

she waited until later in the year before asking children to write "when they are more ready."

Several teachers commented on the push down of the curriculum. Most of the comments came from the more experienced teachers, but Tamara Clark expressed concern about the issue also:

We are making kids do things that they are not ready to do developmentally. It is not that they don't want to--it is not that we're not teaching them correctly--it is not that we're not doing a good job--(it is that) this curriculum (has been) moved down; and it needs to be put back up to where developmentally it needs to be appropriate. It just doesn't fit.

Lisa Cook, a veteran teacher, in talking about the "outlook of the state department," said:

Everybody is doing this constant push, push, push. Whereas we used to dwell on helping the children get along with each other and (taught) skills that they will use all their lives rather than so much (on) the academic skills....Now, they want them to do everything.

At different points later in the interview, Ms. Cook expressed concern about what she saw as a current push to have children reading before they left kindergarten and also about how some teachers she knew of would not allow their students to go to recess if they had not written in their journals. She said, "It's not fair, in my personal opinion, to expect them to write."

In his book Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk (1987), David Elkind cautions early childhood caregivers to make learning experiences appropriate to the level of the child served. Elkind illuminates the consequences of placing children under pressure that they are not equipped to handle. Most of the teachers in this study seemed to embrace this cautionary philosophy and maintained that current education practices are pushing children past the limits of their capabilities. As the examples above show, at least some of the teachers define those limits in different ways. As was evident in the comments quoted in the descriptions of the teachers, Sarah Harper seemed to extol the virtues of pushing for as much as one can get from kindergarten children, saying, "You can't put too much in their heads."

Self Concept

Almost every teacher expressed a desire to help their children have healthy self concepts. Many of them stated that one of their goals for their children was that they feel successful in first grade. Others, like Melinda Burton, talked about giving children credit for trying rather than for their ability to perform with 100% accuracy on tasks such as worksheets and writing using invented spelling. Others said they hoped their children felt comfortable with reading and/or writing before the year ended. Julie Shelton's concerns about the MRT were tied to the fact that she did not want her children to feel "defeated" or "bad about themselves." Kathy Watson had the following to say about her children's self concepts especially in reference to writing:

But the most important thing is, I set the environment that they are
successful no matter what they do and that I accept anything that they

do....

Assisting children in developing healthy self concepts was influential in the teachers' planning for and implementation of literacy instruction. They felt that children needed to feel good about themselves and their abilities to perform well in school. This belief about the needs of their children influenced the activities they planned and the environment they promoted in their classrooms.

Preparation for First Grade

One of the most repeatedly mentioned topics throughout all the interviews was using the kindergarten year to help children get ready for first grade. Almost every teacher referred to the necessity of various activities as a means of preparing the children to be successful in first grade. The most frequently cited activity was the provision of worksheets, or "dittos." Candace Adams felt that they had to "do some" dittos or they would be "overwhelmed by first grade." Tamara Clark referred to worksheets as "I Cares," explaining that she set the purpose for such activities by telling children:

I just sit down with them and say, "Now you know Miss Clark cares about you, and I want you to do well in kindergarten." I really play it up; and I say, "I want you to do good in first grade....Now, when you get in first grade, you have got to sit in your desk all day, and you have to know how to do this." And they do! I mean, first grade is a killer! I wouldn't teach first grade!...So, I just tell them that we are just getting ready for that...to give them a purpose. I'll say, "Now, the reason why I call them 'I Care's'..." And the kids will say, "We know, because

you care about us!" And I say, "That's right." This little group is so good about (saying), "We know, because you care." They are so animated.

A number of teachers reported that one of their goals in the areas of reading and writing was to have as many children as possible be able to identify the names of the letters and their sounds. Lisa Cook said that when children get to "the regular, honest-to-goodness first grade, they need to know what a letter is." Karen Anderson felt that in her school, art and music activities were considered "fluff" because:

(We) had to kind of do away with those to do...so much with the phonics and with the computers and that sort of thing. The children are expected to be ready to go into some form of reading when they go to first grade....They start in with Writing to Read on the computers at the beginning of the year....so they've got to know those letters, (and) they've got to know those sounds to be successful in it....

Carrie Dotson, too, talked about children needing to know the alphabet and the sounds of the letters due to the "pressure of going on." Stephanie Woods said that if her children did not know the alphabet "they're going to have some trouble" in first grade.

In summary, emergent literacy advocates promote the idea of looking on the preschool years as valuable in and of themselves rather than as preparation for a later experience. Apparently, for most of the teachers in this study, that ideal was not realistic. Preparation for first grade influenced activities, such as completion of worksheets, and goals, such as knowing letter names and sounds.

Teachers' Experiences

Experiences that teachers reported had influenced them throughout their careers varied. However, there were several persons and events consistently mentioned. People who had either influenced them in the past, or who they saw as presently influencing them, included administrators, peers, and their students. Events that had been influential were workshops, methods classes, and various aspects of their teaching experiences.

Based on teachers' comments, administrative influence on literacy instruction appeared to be minimal. One principal (also a former building level supervisor) was mentioned by four teachers, and several teachers referred to the new supervisor, Elizabeth Mason. One other former supervisor was also mentioned briefly. A summary of these exceptions follows.

Three teachers from the same school, Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, and Jill Wright said their principal was an advocate of whole language and literature based instruction. All three said that she had provided materials for them to read on the topic. The extent of influence on Jill Wright appeared to be most pronounced:

We have been really encouraged, under (our principal's) guidance to do this (change to a whole language or literature based approach), and she hasn't just left us hanging. She has provided us lots of materials.

If she cannot answer a question, then she knows somebody that can.

The suggestions that she has given to me, or the answers to questions that she has given to me, have been very helpful, and I have really changed my method of teaching.

The only reference to principals at other schools was Karen Anderson's comment that the teachers in her school had to be very flexible because they tended to change principals every year.

Karen Anderson also stated that her change to a whole language approach which came in conjunction with her school voting to become a whole language pilot school for the system was influenced by a supervisor. That supervisor was at the time of this study the principal mentioned above.

As has been mentioned earlier, a new supervisor, Elizabeth Mason, had been hired at the beginning of the year of this study. Several teachers spoke about her influence especially as it related to the administration of the MRT. Tamara Clark felt that Ms. Mason was encouraging the teachers to "branch out" and try new resources and new approaches.

On the day of my visit, Julie Shelton directed her children in completing three worksheets at two different times of the day. The first session involved completing a worksheet related to listening comprehension and one related to counting objects in boxes. In the second session, they completed another listening comprehension worksheet. On both occasions, she spread the children out so that no more than two were sitting at a table and placed cardboard dividers between them to obstruct their view. She reported that her supervisor warned teachers to get children ready for the test when they first started giving it.

Other teachers appeared to be a more powerful influence than administrators. Many of the teachers stated that their primary source of assistance when they first began

teaching kindergarten was another teacher. Monique Walker said, "I depended on my buddy a lot during those first two years!" Kathy Watson said, "I'd give 75% of the credit to my friends next door that guided me through and helped me to grow."

In some cases, the influence of the teacher next door or across the hall was evident. Karen Anderson and Monique Walker both talked about planning together. Candace Adams and Tamara Clark, both relatively early in their careers, looked to Kathy Watson, who had a number of years experience using a whole language philosophy, for whole language type activities. In both cases, I observed activities in use that they later told me came from Ms. Watson. They also both mentioned getting away from gearing their instruction around a "letter of the week" and instead "focusing" on a letter each week, which is the approach Ms. Watson took. Carrie Dotson, Leah McIntire, and Jill Wright all spoke of the same "mentor" they had had in their early days of teaching kindergarten. Leah McIntire and Rachel Stegall both said that they looked for other teachers with the same philosophy as they held and would discuss ideas and activities with them.

The last group of people that influenced the teachers was the students in their classes. When asked how they had changed since first beginning their careers as kindergarten teachers, several teachers said that they had to change from time to time because their children changed from year to year. In most cases, the changes to which they referred indicated the children's preferences. For example, Tamara Clark described a daily literacy activity she did the previous year with her class but followed it by saying that she had not done it this year, because her children had not seemed interested. She said:

It just depends. It depends on the mood. It depends on how interested they are. Last year's group was really into that. This group was just more for moving on to something else. They would rather write a story about the transparency (referring to the Frog On His Own activity), than do that kind of stuff....

Several teachers also spoke of changing due to differing ability levels of their classes. Jill Wright said, "When something doesn't work, you need to find something else. Carrie Dotson said, "Sometimes you try something one year and it doesn't work, and the next year it does." Lisa Cook's description of the influences on her methods due to changes in her children were of a different nature:

My teaching has had to change because our children have changed so....The children are totally different. Their home lives are totally different....I think they (children in the past) simply did not have the kind of homes that our children are somehow growing up in. I don't think perhaps that drugs were as prevalent, and I think we're seeing drug babies. We're seeing home lives that would just raise the hair on your head. You wonder, how can a child function when they go through that? So my teaching has had to change that way...

Teachers noted a variety of experiences that had influenced them, including teaching other grade levels, attending workshops, and referring to past methods courses. Twelve of the 14 teachers in this study had prior teaching experiences, and all of them said without hesitation that those experiences influenced the way they teach kindergarten.

Several of them had taught first grade and said that that experience had helped them to realize what was expected of first grade students and made them aware of what they needed to do in order to better prepare their kindergartners for the coming year. Jill Wright made this comment: "I think that anybody who's a kindergarten teacher probably would be very wise to be a first grade teacher, because you know what is needed in first grade." Carrie Dotson said that her experience teaching physical education helped her know how to organize small group instruction and gave her experience in having children working at different activities simultaneously. Julie Shelton felt her experience as a remedial reading teacher had made her stronger in the reading and language areas. Sarah Harper said her previous experiences made her aware that children needed to be challenged and to learn independence. Kathy Watson had taught a number of grade levels and adult education classes. She said those experiences had helped her see the "whole scope and sequence" and had given her focus on what she needed to do to get the children "started on the right track."

Most of the teachers related that going to inservice workshops provided by the school system or choosing workshops on their own was a way of keeping current. Candace Adams and Tamara Clark had attended a summer workshop provided by the Wright Group, and both felt that it had a powerful influence on their teaching the following year. I noticed that both used the term "sneaky tricky letters" to refer to sounds they thought the children might not be able to encode on their own. When I asked about the origin of that term, they explained that they had heard it at the Wright Group workshop. Karen Anderson, Leah McIntire, and Monique Walker referred to a

teleconference on whole language several years prior to this study as being influential.

Julie Shelton reported that she got the idea for the lesson that I observed with the book

The Chick and the Duckling from an inservice provided by a textbook company. Kathy

Watson was perhaps the most influenced by the workshop on whole language referenced

in her description. Rachel Stegall said that she tried to always attend workshops geared

for early childhood. She spoke of attending a summer workshop where she learned how

to make and use interactive charts. She used them profusely the next year. Leah

McIntire said that other than the whole language teleconference mentioned above that she

found little "available through inservice." Several other teachers echoed the same

complaint stating that it was rarely something they could "bring back to the classroom."

Of all the teachers in this study, only Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Leah

McIntire, Rachel Stegall, and Kathy Watson seemed to have been significantly influenced

by workshops they had attended. Interestingly, attendance for each of them was

self-initiated.

Stephanie Woods and Candace Adams related that they had relied on their

experience student teaching in kindergarten to help them when they first began teaching

kindergarten. Several others spoke about having a knowledge base for what to do

because they had had a methods course designed specifically for kindergarten.

In several cases, the length of the teachers' experience seemed to be influential in

their approach to literacy instruction. Number of years experience for these teachers

ranged from three to 27 years. Looking at the two extremes: Lisa Cook, Carrie Dotson,

and Leah McIntire all began their kindergarten teaching careers more than 20 years prior

to this study. They were the only teachers who reported that they used experience charts, a method promoted during the 1970s. Melinda Burton, Rachel Stegall, and Stephanie Woods had each been teaching three years at the time of this study. They all relied on literature-based methods in their literacy instruction.

In summary, every teacher had a different set of experiences and a somewhat different group of people that influenced them and their literacy instruction. According to this group of teachers, however, the most influential of these people were the children themselves. "Because my children were different" was the most common response when asked what prompted them to change their practice. Peers were also very influential with many of the teachers. Several reported that they planned together. Others stated that had it not been for the teacher next door the first year of their career they would have been hopelessly lost. While the influence of administrators is a "fact of life" with which teachers must learned to deal, this group of teachers, with certain isolated exceptions, did not seem significantly influenced by either their principals or their supervisors.

Obviously, no two teachers have had the same experiences; however, many of the same type of experiences were commonly cited as influences on their practice by the teachers in this study. For example, several teachers mentioned inservice training and workshops as being influential. Some found such experiences not helpful. It would appear from comments made by teachers in this study that those training sessions that teachers are free to choose for themselves have the most significant results. Prior teaching experience was undeniably influential for this group of teachers. When asked if their prior experiences had influenced their kindergarten teaching, immediate responses such as "Of

course!" and "Oh, sure!" were common, indicating a high level of influence. Blumer (1969) and others adhering to an interactionist perspective state that we construct our meanings through our interactions with others. Sometimes the words "and materials" are tagged onto that statement. It certainly appears that this group of teachers defined literacy instruction based at least somewhat on the people and experiences described in this section.

Personal Viewpoints on Teaching Kindergarten

In observing the teachers, it was apparent that each one had developed a viewpoint on teaching kindergarten unique to herself. This viewpoint, in turn, translated into an distinctive teaching style. As I spoke with each one, it was obvious that not only was this style idiosyncratic, it was dynamic as well. They often spoke of what they "used to do" and what they were planning to do "next year." It was also obvious that as they came upon new ideas they adapted those ideas to fit their styles. They also adapted and changed activities they had done in the past to suit the needs of their children and their own personalities. Leah McIntire explained, "Over the years you just foster your own method of doing things."

Teachers recognized that everyone has a different style. Several of them talked about "we all do it differently" referring to any number of activities. They spoke of the freedom they had in kindergarten to develop their own style and of the ways they differed from others. Many of them described activities unique only to themselves, and others spoke of playing to their own strengths. Tamara Clark explained, "We want to do things that we are good at, don't we?"

Karen Anderson commented on both the restrictions and the freedom of teaching kindergarten:

We're free to do our own sort of thing as long as we meet basic skills and as long as they master what is on the report card. So you are kind of left to do your own areas of emphasis....(It is a matter of) personal choice....Each school does their own thing. Now Monique and I...luckily we teach a lot alike. We think a lot alike, so we don't have any problems. But when we go to kindergarten meetings, we find out that we are very different than a lot of them. When everybody talks, (you find out that) every school's different. They all have their own areas (of interest)....

Several other teachers spoke of feeling free to develop their own style of teaching. For example, Leah McIntire commented:

Some things (in the blue book) I think you'd be really surprised that are required. I like to look at it, and I accept that they have asked me to teach this. (However), I'd like to do it my own way. I'd like to be free. If you tell me what you want me to teach, then I'll just be glad to do it...(laughter)...but the way I think it needs to be done. (laughter)

She also commented, as did Karen Anderson above, about the differences between different teachers:

We have as many different philosophies as we have kindergarten classrooms, in just our system, I think. And, it's quite a spectrum from

one end to the other....

Ms. McIntire had the following to say about her own style of teaching:

I think that there are people who are best suited, thank goodness, for different levels. And mine is kindergartners--no doubt about it. Because I don't like--and had one year of--being handed the text. And I accept that, but when (they) say that you have to finish this many chapters, and you have to get this much written on a green reading card, I think that is an unacceptable expectation for children. In kindergarten, it is the free-est you will ever be, to address individual differences.... These children may never paint on an easel again,--it just breaks my heart--or (they may never) hear "The Raggedy Man" again. I think there are things that we are free-er to do in kindergarten. It's a one-shot experience, and I don't want to be limited by books and workbooks. There is just so much time in the day, and they need all these things--these experiences.

Rachel Stegall commented on developing her style as a novice teacher:

I had these rose colored glasses on when I graduated from school (and thought) that when I got my own classroom, I would just do this, that, and the other. And everything would just be so wonderful. And it wasn't. I had a very difficult first year. But it was really good for me to have that. It really was. I had some very difficult behavior problems that I had to learn to deal with. I had to learn to conference with parents, and be able to do that with assurance and go in there and feel confident

in what I was doing. Now, that's not to say that I'm right on everything; but you go in, and I have learned that if you try something it's not going to work the same way every year. You may do something with one class and it work just beautifully. You do the same thing, follow the same steps (with another class), and it's not going to have the same results. You have to just keep trying. That was one of the things I had to learn. You know, I felt like such a failure when I tried something and I had put so much time in it and just fell flat on my face. I thought, "I can't believe this." Now, I have learned that, okay, if that didn't do, then I have to try something different. I think I feel more comfortable in straying from the manuals saying, you know, "This is the way to do it." Because "this way" doesn't do for everybody. That's a guide for you, and then you have to put your own personality and your own abilities into what you are doing.

Teachers indicated that they changed their methods continuously. The most frequently cited reason, as Ms. Stegall referenced above, was the differences in their classes from one year to the next. Continuing change was evidenced by the frequent comment, "Next year I am going to..." Several teachers had difficulty verbalizing any changes they had made when asked directly, but throughout the interview they made statements that indicated change such as "I used to...."

A number of teachers indicated that they saw themselves in process by speaking of changes for next year. Sarah Harper said she was going to change the order in which she

presented the letters. Kathy Watson talked about deleting certain units and changing the set up of her room for next year. Rachel Stegall talked about changing her approach to center time.

Candace Adams said that she changed "every year, because I get very bored doing the very same thing." Later in the interview she spoke of "trying to be progressive and working for new ways to do new things." Tamara Clark also talked about getting bored with the same activity as an impetus for change.

Several of the more experienced teachers reflected on the ways in which they had changed over the years. Karen Anderson said that because she had a new principal almost every year, she had learned to "be flexible and roll with the punches." Carrie Dotson and Leah McIntire spoke of no longer being as concerned if their entire curriculum did not revolve around the current theme. Lisa Cook had this to say about changing her methods: "It's great to have all this new stuff, but it's also good to stay true to how you feel about things." Monique Walker talked about "so many great things we used to do" in reference to her whole language days that she felt had been pushed out by the use of the computers.

As Rachel Stegall mentioned earlier, teachers felt free to adapt materials to suit their own needs and those of their children. Almost every teacher spoke of adapting the AlphaTime program, stating such concerns as it took too much time, parts of it were boring, and it was "too preschoolish." Carrie Dotson spoke of adapting virtually everything she did:

If somebody were to come in, they'd say, "You're not doing this right."

...None of it is like it's supposed to be....I'm one that just takes bits and

pieces from lots of things and puts (them together).

In summary, style, or personal viewpoint, is an idiosyncratic, dynamic process; and a teacher's instruction is highly dependent upon it. Each teacher has developed a style unique to herself in light of her experiences and the people with whom she has come in contact. Each person is constantly changing and adapting his or her style. The kindergarten teachers in this study acknowledged that they were all different and that they all had different styles of teaching. They spoke of how they used to do something and how they were going to do things differently next year, indicating that they saw themselves as always in process. Their styles were reflected in their literacy instruction. Tamara Clark was energetic and animated in her dealings with her children while Candace Adams was low-key and sedate. Sarah Harper had a commanding style--her voice boomed across the classroom--while Julie Shelton's children had to strain to hear her speak. The use of these two pairs of teachers is significant. When focusing on each pairs' experiences and their perceptions of students' needs, they are quite similar. However, when personality influences are factored in, it becomes apparent that their teaching styles are very different.

TIME INFLUENCES

Although comments about influences related to time constraints were not as predominant as were influences related to the curriculum and to the teachers' personal philosophies, they seemed significant to a number of the teachers. Teachers attempting to move toward a whole language approach to teaching were concerned with the time

involved in that process. Candace Adams, Tamara Clark, Rachel Stegall, and Jill Wright all commented about the time involved in constructing materials and in arriving at the point of calling themselves "whole language teachers."

Indicating that she had already invested a great deal of time and saw the need for a great deal more, Candace Adams said of the process:

I've tried to incorporate a lot more of the whole language approach... and I am still working on that.... Whole language isn't something that you wave your hand and do it overnight. That is something you are constantly working on. And, you know, Jill and I were talking about that yesterday...how many things there are to make in order to do whole language....

Tamara Clark described a similar viewpoint:

I just (believe that) five, six, and seven year olds should be reading all day. I really want to move towards that way. But, it takes time, lots of planning, and a lot of years to figure out how to do all that....

Several teachers spoke of lacking time to do all the activities they wished to do with their children. Candace Adams related that she sometimes ran out of time to do all the units she wanted to teach in a year. Melinda Burton said, "It's hard to get it (Writing to Read) all in." Carrie Dotson cut out the writing component of her "Yipiyuk" activity because she felt the activity was taking too long, and she had other activities planned. She also talked about why she rarely took dictation so children could write their own books.

She said, "Sometimes I like to do that, but it's too much writing. It takes forever when they want to do their own book....It takes forever and a day to sit and do that...."

Kathy Watson had taught in a whole day kindergarten program the year prior to this study, so she was having difficulty scheduling a shorter day to get to all the activities she wished. In speaking of having her children write in journals, she said:

When I was in my former school, we had whole day kindergarten, and one of the activities in the afternoon (was) everybody would write. But because of half day it is all I can do to get (journals) in....But--the journals at this time--they are not doing enough in them, but I don't know at this time how to re-arrange the schedule....

The most concern about time with the children came from the two teachers who felt constrained to use Writing to Read in its entirety, Karen Anderson and Monique Walker. Although five other teachers interviewed had access to the program, all of them seemed to have no qualms about using the program when they saw fit and adapting it to fit their needs. Julie Shelton ceased using the program for a time to prepare her children to take the MRT. Melinda Burton stated that she was not going to start the program until after the MRT. Leah McIntire and Lisa Cook did not mention it at all and did not use it on the days I observed. Carrie Dotson used it during center time as she wished. However, as quoted earlier, although Monique Walker did not say who told them, she stated that they had been told to use the computers as they were intended, which was for the Writing to Read program. She and Karen Anderson listed a whole string of activities they used to do but no longer had time for since the implementation of Writing to Read.

Activities mentioned by one or both were art, music, special projects, and taking dictation. They also covered the letters of the alphabet in less time than a majority of the other teachers, taking only three days on each letter as opposed to a week. Ms. Walker explained that this was because they needed to cover the entire alphabet prior to beginning Write to Read after Christmas. Apparently, one of the suggested prerequisites of the program is that the children be familiar with the letters of the alphabet.

As seen in the examples above, time, or the lack of it, influenced teachers' planning and implementation of literacy instruction. Teachers in the process of implementing whole language techniques often felt frustrated that they could not speed the process and become whole language teachers "over night." Interestingly, the two teachers who, because of perceived outside constraints, felt mandated to implement a program, were the ones who felt the most influenced by time. They felt that they were not serving the needs of their children and were not able to do activities that they enjoyed and felt the children enjoyed because of the time required to implement the Writing to Read program.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Teachers were heavily influenced by the kindergarten curriculum as defined by mandated skills instruction and materials available. Mandated skills instruction included skills listed in the state curriculum guide and on the report card and skills tested by the MRT. Teachers viewed these influences as constraints upon their instruction. Two teachers even referred to the curriculum guide as their "Bible," and others seemed to define the kindergarten experience by the skills listed on the report card. Finally, twelve of

the fourteen teachers involved in this study cited specific influences on their instruction due to the mandated administration of the MRT.

Most teachers appeared to feel less constrained by materials available to them than by the mandated skills instruction. Although AlphaTime was available in every classroom, most teachers felt free to adapt it to suit their needs. Computers were available in eight of the fourteen classrooms involved in this study. Of those eight classrooms, seven used IBM's Writing to Read program. Again, most teachers seemed to feel free to adapt the use of the computers in whatever manner they saw fit. Two teachers, however, did not appear to adapt either the AlphaTime program or the Writing to Read program. These two teachers, both from the same school, seemed to believe that in their situation they were required to use the programs as designed.

Most of the teachers attempting to implement whole language techniques into their literacy instruction spoke of the influence of materials and workshops available from the Wright Group. The only periodical read by more than one teacher was the Preschool/ Kindergarten edition of Mailbox, a teacher idea magazine. Curriculum influences fell into two categories for this group of teachers: those they felt constrained to use; and those they felt free to adapt and use as they wished.

A second source of influence was the teachers' personal philosophies which were based largely on their notions of children's needs, their experiences, and their personalities. Teachers saw children's needs as being a hands-on/developmental curriculum, a healthy self concept, and adequate preparation for first grade. Providing for all three of these needs presented some conflicts for the teachers. They saw children's self concepts being

enhanced by a hands-on/developmental curriculum and by adequate preparation for first grade; however, these two notions often conflicted. Teachers believed their children needed experiential learning but felt that they had to give worksheets in order to prepare their children for the rigors of the first grade curriculum.

Based on observations and comments made by the teachers, their personal philosophies were also based on their experiences. The two experiences that appeared to be most influential were prior teaching experiences and adjusting instruction to the differing needs of children throughout their careers. The teachers' personal philosophies were also based on their viewpoints on teaching kindergarten. These viewpoints were unique to each person and seemed to be dynamic in nature.

The final influence apparent from the data, time constraints, did not seem to be as substantial an influence as did curriculum influences or personal philosophy influences. However, two groups of teachers did cite time constraints as influential on their literacy instruction: those teachers attempting to implement whole language techniques; and the two teachers who felt constrained to use the Writing to Read program. The first group was anxious to move toward a methodology they saw as beneficial. The second group was anxious because they felt they were moving away from methods that were more beneficial than their present program.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are a description of the literacy instruction of a group of kindergarten teachers and influences on their practice. This study depicts one point in time--in effect, a snapshot of literacy instruction in the spring of 1995 in Vicksburg. An important axiom of symbolic interactionism is that with each encounter, with others or with materials, people are changed (Blumer, 1969). Based on that axiom, these teachers would not be exactly the same again; on another day, or during another year, the snapshot would be different. The data from this study confirms the dynamic nature of the instructional process and of teachers' individual development.

In this chapter, general conclusions are discussed based on the findings of this study. A discussion of the findings follows; and finally, implications for research and for educational practice are proposed.

CONCLUSIONS

The research questions for this study were: (a) What are the literacy practices of kindergarten teachers? and (b) What influences the literacy instruction of kindergarten teachers? Based on data collected in this study, the following general conclusions are derived from the findings.

- (a) Literacy instruction in kindergarten is alphabet driven.
- (b) Literacy activities utilized by the teachers reflected both reading readiness practice and emergent literacy practice.

- (c) Teachers based literacy instruction on curriculum influences, personal philosophy influences, and time influences rather than on a particular formal philosophy.
- (d) Developing a personal teaching style is an idiosyncratic, dynamic process.

"The alphabet rules"

When asked to state their goals for their students in the areas of reading and writing, 12 of the 14 teachers included "identify the letters of the alphabet" and/or "know the sounds of the letters" in their responses. For many, it was the first goal mentioned. The two teachers who did not specifically mention letters and/or letter sounds were Tamara Clark and Kathy Watson. They seemed to have different aspirations for their students because they gave "reading" and a 'love of reading' as goals. Both, however, did utilize letter instruction in some fashion in their teaching, indicating that letter identification and letter sounds were construed as important concepts in their classrooms.

All of the teachers, with the exception of Kathy Watson, used the AlphaTime program as part of their instruction with most modifying the program to suit their needs. Many teachers spoke of using a "letter of the week" construct in their planning for the first 26 weeks of each academic year. Although some teachers spent less time on each letter, they all had specific activities that they planned for each letter. Most of the teachers isolated letter instruction, not attempting to integrate it with any particular content area related units. Several teachers who were attempting to implement more whole language type activities into their teaching based the letter of the week on the unit they were teaching (e.g., integrating activities designed to teach the letter "b" with a unit on bears).

Kathy Watson utilized a similar plan but called "b" the "letter focus of the week" rather than the "letter of the week," meaning that she did not plan activities designed to only teach the letter but rather emphasized finding the letter within the confines of the books and charts the class read on bears. She did, it is important to note, teach a formal writing lesson on the focal letter at some point in the week.

Although several teachers planned various other literacy related activities, such as read aloud sessions and group writing sessions, reinforcing letter names and letter sounds was usually integrated into these activities, again indicating its importance. Letters and their sounds were also reinforced incidentally throughout the day through the use of the children's names or words related to other activities. For example, during a parachute activity in the gymnasium, Leah McIntire called children to run under the parachute according to the initial letters of their names, and Carrie Dotson reinforced the /y/ sound by pointing out to a group of children that they were being served frozen yogurt in the cafeteria.

"A mixed bag of tricks"

Teachers seemed to take from both the reading readiness and emergent literacy philosophies those things that they had assimilated into their definitions of literacy instruction. Karen Anderson referred to borrowing from a variety of approaches as a "mixed bag of tricks." Teachers used terms associated with both perspectives (e.g., skills, maturity, hands-on activities, and invented spelling) in describing their instruction, sometimes in reference to the same activity. No one teacher consistently used only whole language or only reading readiness techniques in her teaching.

Pigeonholing teachers as having either reading readiness or emergent literacy perspectives was virtually impossible. Although some seemed to belong more to one "camp" than the other, they all implemented practices associated with both perspectives. For example, Sarah Harper identified herself as a "paper-and-pencil" type teacher indicating that she adhered more to a skills based approach which would be associated with the reading readiness perspective. However, she sometimes took dictation from her children and made Wright Group materials available to them, both of which are activities associated with a whole language/emergent literacy perspective. In contrast, Kathy Watson identified herself as a whole language teacher, but she was the only teacher who taught a formal handwriting lesson each week.

Given the visible influences of both perspectives on the teachers, it seemed more fitting to regard them as being on a continuum rather than attempt to place them in one category or the other. The concept of a continuum allows viewing the teachers as having the flexibility to move along the continuum, attempting new ideas and yet relying on activities they considered to be "tried and true." As Lisa Cook put it, "It's great to have all this new stuff, but it's also good to stay true to how you feel about things...."

Teachers not only used activities related to both philosophies, similar activities appealed to teachers who seemed to operate under differing basic philosophies. Their implementations of those activities did vary, however. Following are two vignettes of similar activities implemented by teachers at different points on the reading readiness/emergent literacy continuum. The activity in both cases was the reading aloud of a predictable book followed by a writing activity that asked the children to relate the

contents of the book to their own lives. The first vignette is from Tamara Clark's classroom. Ms. Clark, as evident throughout the discussion of the findings, was very interested in applying whole language techniques in her teaching stating that her goal was to "become a whole language teacher." Although she did not see herself as being a "whole language teacher" just yet, she did implement a number of activities related to that philosophy in her teaching, indicating that she was near the whole language/emergent literacy end of the continuum. The second vignette is from Julie Shelton's classroom. Ms. Shelton indicated an interest in whole language but stated that she was "not familiar" with it. This statement, along with the observation that she had her children complete three worksheets throughout the course of the day, would indicate that Ms. Shelton was nearer the reading readiness end of the continuum.

Tamara Clark

"What are some of the things that we do well together, that if we tried it by ourselves, it wouldn't work out as well?" The children made suggestions. "What about at home?" The children gave additional ideas. "How do you help out at home?" Some of the children told the class what they did. When Ms. Clark wanted to end this part of the discussion, she said, "I didn't get a chance to tell everyone (how I help out at home), so when I count to three, I want everyone to turn to someone and tell them what you do around the house." She counted to three; and then she, and all the children, turned to each other and said things such as: "wash the dishes, dust, mop, etc." This discussion led into a

read-aloud session using a spin-off of "The Little Red Hen." In the book, the Little Yellow Chick is trying to get his house prepared for a party, and as in the original story, his friends are unwilling to help with the chores.

"This is a new story about four animals." When she held the book up, the children immediately started decoding the title, The Little Yellow Chicken, without being prompted to do so. After a bit of discussion, they read the title unassisted. "Why has the chicken got a balloon and crown on his head (referring to the title page)?" The children responded with their ideas. She turned the page. The illustration had a frog, a bee, and a beetle. "Now, we know who the other characters are." She continued to turn the pages of the book while the children made comments. "Who said that about the birthday party? You're right....Ok, let's read it. And guess who it is by?"

The children said, "Joy Cowley."

"Joy Cowley, our favorite." Ms. Clark then read the book and tracked the print with a pointer. The children quickly began to join in on the repetitive refrain.

"Hop it," said the frog.

"Buzz off," said the bee.

And the big brown beetle

said, "Stop bugging me."

At one point in the story the animals turned their backs on the little chick. Ms. Clark said, "Show me how they would turn their backs." At another point, she asked the children to predict if the little chick would say "yes" or "no" by putting their thumbs up or down. She reminded the children, "You can't vote for both. This is called predicting." She also asked if anyone knew what "scrumptious" meant when it was used in the story.

"When we come back in, we are going to act it out...I want you to tell me what bugs you...I am going to put one of these papers (holding up a duplicated paper) on your table. It says, 'It bugs me when...' She told them about an incident that "bugged" her. "I'm going to write: 'It bugs me when my husband and my son walk on my clean floor with muddy shoes'....What's our plan for when we come back in (from lunch)?"

The class returned from lunch at 11:00. As they came in, Ms. Clark passed out photocopies of the animals in The Little Yellow Chick—one per child. She had them sit in groups by animal. "Let's review our speech parts. What does the frog say?...Okay. The bee says....And the big brown beetle says...."

She then opened to the title page of the book and read tracking the print with a pointer. As she read, she stopped to allow the children to say their parts. She was the Little Yellow Chick, and the assistant was the Little Red Hen (the Little Yellow Chick's grandmother). The

children also shook their heads, laughed, and turned their backs when those actions were mentioned in the story. Two children took up the pictures while Ms. Clark placed a writing paper on the easel. The paper had an outline of a bee on it along with the words "It bugs me when _____" and a place for the name.

Ms. Clark began writing, saying the words as she wrote: ...my ...husband...wears...muddy...shoes...on...my...clean...floor!" She put her initials on the name space.

"I've got a problem. I need your help. What do you do if you don't know how to spell a word the dictionary way?

The children responded, "Sound it out."

"That's right! Just sound it out. Put down the sounds you hear, leave a space, and move on to the next word. Listen to the sound, use your alphabet card (indicating small cards with the alphabet alongside pictures beginning with each letter that are available on every table), ask a friend, and then move on."

The children went to their tables and began to write. Ms. Clark and the assistant went around helping children decide what to write, assisting when needed ["What do you put at the end (of the sentence)?... Look at my mouth: /oo/. What makes that sound? ...Right! See you didn't need me!"] and asking them to read what they had written. At one point, Mrs. Clark noticed someone having difficulty thinking of

an idea. "Let's brainstorm. Who wants to share what you are writing? 'It bugs me when...(pointing to a child who shared).' 'It bugs me when...(pointing to another child who shared).'" She continued asking several children to share what they were writing.

"When you get finished, I want you to color any color you want. We are going to show these tomorrow at group time, and you are going to read your own."

Julie Shelton

At 8:25, the children moved to the group area for a story. "Remember when I read you this story about a chicken and a duck?" She showed them several illustrations in the book reminding them of what happened in that story. "I have another good story to read to you. It's called The Chick and the Duckling." Ms. Shelton then read the story pausing occasionally to ask questions. "What's he digging a hole for?...You think the chick will dig for worms, too?...Do ducks swim?... (yes)...Sure... the duck could swim, but what happened to the chick?...Think the chick learned his lesson?"

After the story was completed, she asked, "What happened at the very first of the story?...What did the chick say? (Me, too)...Let me write those (on the chalkboard). I'll bet you can read them. He says this in the whole book." She then went through the book showing the illustrations and repeating "then the duckling said...and what did

the chick say?"

The children responded each time with "Me, too." After more discussion of the book, Ms. Shelton said, "So the other two little words we can read are 'Not me.'" She wrote "Not me" on the board below "Me, too."

"Let's read those together." She pointed to the words with a pointer as the children read them with her.

Next, Ms. Shelton talked about what the children were unable to do when they were little babies. She asked, "Could you dress yourself?... (no)... No, and now you can. Could you feed yourself?... (no). No, and now you can." She continued making suggestions, and the children responded "no" each time.

"Now, I want you to think about something you can do really well now that you couldn't do when you were a baby. David and Sarah can draw really good pictures. Olivia, Lauren, and Christi can answer questions really well. You might can run or jump really well." She then called each child's name and asked him or her to tell her something that he or she could do well now. Ms. Shelton would repeat the responses and say "Good" or "Great" or "That's right."

Ms. Shelton held up a piece of 9x12" manila paper. "At the top, I have the words 'I am.' Read that with me.... If you want to change your mind (write something other than what they had told her earlier),

that's Okay." She instructed them to draw a picture of themselves doing something. She called their names, and the children went to get the papers. "I already have your names at the tops, Guys, so you can get busy drawing."

After approximately 10 minutes, Ms. Shelton went to each child and asked, "What are you doing (in the picture)?" She then wrote what they said on their papers in an open space and said, "Good." At one point, a child gave her a rather long explanation, so she said, "I can't write all of that." Another child had copied the class motto from a poster on the door. "What are you doing? You are writing words, aren't you? Good for you."

After she had written for each child, Ms. Shelton called the children to the group time area. As they handed their papers to her, she put an Easter egg sticker on them. "You've done such a good job, I'm going to put an Easter egg sticker on them....Very good job, and everyone got a sticker."

"Now. I'm going to show you everyone's papers and read them." She explained what they would be doing and called two children to stand on either side of her. "This is William's paper. It says, 'I am writing words.' Anthony, is that something you would like to do?" Anthony nodded his head. "So what would you say?"

The child responded, "Me, too."

"Me, too. So, I'm going to tape 'Me, too' to the picture." Ms. Shelton pointed to the words "Me, too" on the board and picked up a slip of paper with the words on it and taped the small strip to the picture. She then reversed the process, asking the first child if he would like to do what the second child had written. "Let's read what they said." She then read both papers including the responses. She continued this procedure calling two children at a time to stand beside her. Some of the children responded, "Not me" and she would then point to those words and taped that phrase to the picture. The children put the papers in their cubbies as she finished with each pair.

"What are the words we learned today? Let's read them together." The children read "Me, too" and "Not me" with her as she pointed to the words.

On the surface, these two activities seem quite similar. They are, in essence, literature-based writing activities. One has an art component, and the other has a drama component. Closer analysis, however, reveals something of the teachers' perspectives concerning how children learn and what literacy instruction should be. Julie Shelton spoke of this activity in her interview as a new approach for her, an idea she had picked up at a workshop given by a reading textbook publisher. On the other hand, it was obvious from the materials displayed on Tamara Clark's classroom walls that activities such as this were commonplace.

Several similarities exist between the two vignettes. In both classrooms, the teachers introduced the story. Ms. Clark asked the children to talk about what they did to help out at home, and Ms. Shelton showed pictures from a related book and reviewed it with the children. Both teachers related the books to the children's lives: Ms. Clark with the introductory discussion and Ms. Shelton with the follow-up discussion about something they could do well. Both modeled possible responses for the writing segment of the activity: Ms. Clark by writing her own response on a paper and Ms. Shelton by making suggestions about what several children could do well. Both activities allowed creative expression from the children.

The differences in the activities are more indicative of the different perspectives of the teachers. In Ms. Clark's room, the children were actively involved in the reading process: they read the title themselves; they joined in with the repetitive refrain without prompting; they became physically involved by turning their backs; and they predicted what would happen next in the story. In Ms. Shelton's room, the children sat quietly and listened as she read the story. They did not actively participate. Differences in the children's behavior reflect the teachers' expectations and judgments of the children's abilities. Whole language/emergent literacy teachers expect that children can read. Reading readiness teachers expect that children are not yet ready to read; therefore, they do not encourage them to do so.

The differences in perspective are evident in the contrasting writing activities as well. Ms. Clark modeled the writing process by revealing her own thought about what "bugged her" and then writing it as the children observed. She then reviewed how they

should go about spelling the words they needed and then allowed the children to write their own thoughts on the papers. She and her assistant rotated among the children scaffolding their efforts, encouraging them, and reinforcing letter/sound relationships. Ms. Clark announced toward the end of the activity that they would each read their own papers the next day. Ms. Shelton, on the other hand, wrote the children's names for them, wrote their responses for them, and then read their responses for them. Although she said, "Let's read what they said," she was the one that read, not the children. Again, these responses indicate the differing perspectives of the teachers. Emergent literacy teachers believe that children learn to write by writing, that children can read what they have written, that letters and letter sounds are best taught within the context of meaningful print, and that the teacher's job is to facilitate, or scaffold, children's learning. In contrast, reading readiness teachers do not believe that children are ready to write and therefore, do not expect that they will do so.

In summary, as exemplified by the vignettes above, every teacher used activities related to both a reading readiness and an emergent literacy perspective; however, their literacy instruction and their comments seemed to place them at various points on a continuum from one perspective to the other. Yet, based on their comments, they did not necessarily remain in one place along the continuum. They spoke of trying new ideas and discarding others. This implies process, or movement along the continuum. The causes for movement along the continuum will be discussed in the next section; however, it is apparent that change is usually gradual rather than sudden. An overnight change--in this case, changing from a reading readiness to an emergent literacy philosophy--is a rare

happening. Not only is change typically gradual, it is often "painful," as Kathy Watson indicated when she spoke of her conversion to whole language.

Influences on Literacy Instruction

Instead of being driven by a formal philosophy, one defined by researchers or experts in the field, this group of teachers seemed to have developed their own definitions of literacy instruction based largely on curriculum influences, personal philosophy influences, and time influences. The balancing of these areas of influence varied from teacher to teacher.

Some teachers seemed to base almost all of their decisions about planning and implementing literacy instruction on curriculum influences either relying heavily on skills mandated by the state curriculum guide or the report card. Others seemed profoundly influenced by the skills tested on the MRT. Still others were influenced by the materials available to them, relying on the most current program to dictate their literacy practice.

Other teachers seemed to rely on their personal philosophies to influence their literacy practices. Their personal philosophies were strongly influenced by what they perceived to be the needs of their children, their experiences, and their "styles" of teaching. Needs of the children were seen to be an appropriate curriculum, a healthy self concept, and preparation for first grade. Preparation for first grade and a healthy self concept were closely aligned in many teachers' minds as it was their goal that their students feel successful in first grade. Unfortunately, there was a negative link between what the teachers considered an appropriate curriculum and preparation for first grade. Many of

them said they used worksheets, which was against their philosophy, because they wanted to get the children ready for first grade work.

People and events combined in unique ways to make each teacher's experiences an influence on her literacy instruction. Teachers spoke of inservice training and peers that had influenced their planning for instruction. The most influential people were the children in their classes, and the most influential experience for most was their prior teaching experiences.

Time influences were most prevalent in the teachers who relied heavily on programmed instruction, specifically, the Writing to Read program. The two teachers who felt constrained to implement the program fully complained of the program pushing out other activities that they enjoyed and felt were beneficial because of the time required to execute the program. Teachers attempting to implement more whole language techniques also commented about the amount of time it took to not only prepare whole language activities but to become a whole language teacher.

"All of us are different"

A teacher's style of teaching profoundly influences her instruction. Developing a personal teaching style is an idiosyncratic, dynamic process influenced by many factors, including that teacher's personal philosophy of how children learn, her personality, and her experiences. As Carrie Dotson explained it, "All of us are different."

Although the curriculum influences outlined in this study were consistent for each teacher in this system, their responses to those influences were unique to each individual. Several teachers spoke of the need for teachers within the system to be more consistent in

their approaches to aid children who might transfer from one school to another. However, many more spoke of enjoying the freedom to develop their own scope and sequence, to rely on their children's interests for direction in planning units, and to teach as suited their own personalities. As Leah McIntire put it, "(I) like to do it my own way."

The first premise of symbolic interactionism as stated by Blumer (1969) is:

"Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (p.2). Each participant in this study had constructed her own meaning for literacy instruction. For some, it closely resembled the reading readiness perspective; for others it more closely resembled an emergent literacy perspective. However, each "act(ed) toward" literacy instruction "on the basis of the meanings" that literacy instruction had for them. Those who were nearer the reading readiness end of the continuum were more likely to divide their instruction into segmented lessons based on one skill, such as blends. Those nearer the emergent literacy end of the continuum were more likely to include skills instruction within meaningful print such as a story or the children's own writings.

Blumer's (1969, p.2) second premise of symbolic interactionism is: "The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows." Because each teacher had experienced different social interactions from every other teacher, their "meanings" for literacy instruction were unique to themselves. These meanings, however, were based on experiences with "fellows" such as administrators, parents, peers, and children. No two teachers had ever had exactly the same group of children, so it stands to reason that their experiences and meanings would

differ. It also stands to reason that their different meanings would translate to different methods of teaching, accounting for the idiosyncratic aspect of personal teaching style.

Blumer's (1969, p.2) last premise states that "These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters." The concept of "modifying" explains the dynamic nature of developing a personal teaching style. As each teacher encounters new "things," be it a child who has difficulty learning a particular concept or an inspirational workshop, her concept, or definition, of literacy instruction is altered. This process continues throughout her career because no matter how old she is or how much teaching experience she has, she is always meeting new people and encountering new experiences. Therefore, her definition of literacy instruction, or her movement back and forth along the continuum, is always in a state of flux.

DISCUSSION

An important difference between the reading readiness and the emergent literacy approaches to teaching reading and writing is the point of emphasis. In reading readiness, the focus is on the product--what the child can do at a certain point. A child is seen as able to read or not able to read with no middle ground. Errors are just that, errors, something wrong that needs to be corrected. The teacher's goal is to assist the child in correcting those errors in order to produce a better "product."

In emergent literacy, the focus is on the process--where the child is on the continuum of learning to read and write with the end of the continuum being an adult form

of reading and writing. A child is seen as "emerging" as a reader and writer. The idea is not that the child cannot read; he or she is merely not at the end of the continuum. Errors are seen as clues to where the child is on the continuum and used as an indicator of where assistance is needed to help the child along the continuum.

Most experts in the field of early childhood education have no difficulty using an "emergent" lens to view young children. It is considered developmentally appropriate (Bredecamp, 1987). It is lauded by experts in the field (Clay, 1975; Sulzby and Teale, 1989). It is viewed as a misconception for early childhood educators not to accept this view of children (Elkind, 1988). But, the emergent perspective is applied only to children. Paradoxically, people who have no difficulty seeing children as "in progress" fail to provide teachers the same leeway. Teachers are seen as adhering to one viewpoint or the other. They are either emergent literacy advocates, or they are not, with no middle ground.

This study has shown that indeed most teachers appear to be somewhere in the middle. Just like children on the emergent literacy continuum slide back and forth as they encounter new information, so their teachers slide back and forth as they encounter new ideas and have new experiences.

The analogy of children on the emergent literacy continuum and teachers on the reading readiness/emergent literacy continuum has several more connections. For example, Kathy Watson noted that her children seemed "stuck" using the sentence pattern "I see ____." She said they were comfortable with that, and she was satisfied to let them write that pattern until they were ready to move onto something new, which she had

no doubt they would do given time. She said that she gently encouraged them to try something else but did not insist.

Analogous to this phenomenon is the fact that many of the teachers in this study seemed to view whole language as something you do rather than as a perspective on how children come to literacy. This seems to be akin to a child looking at writing as continuously copying "I see ____." Just as the child is focusing on a small segment of the overall process, so teachers who look at whole language as charts and big books are focusing on just a part of the overall concept. Also, as a child copies "I can ____." for the fiftieth or sixtieth time, he or she is holding on to something that is comfortable, but yet at the same time is pushing the limits of that comfort by filling in the blank with something different each time. Similarly, as teachers repeatedly use Mrs. Wishy Washy or The Jigaree, something with which they have had success and with which they feel comfortable, they gradually see children react differently (different groups of children were one of the primary impetuses for change reported by teachers) and push the limits of that comfort. Both the child in his or her writing and the teacher in his or her teaching are moving along the continuum to the point where they get the whole picture.

From a somewhat different perspective, emergent literacy practitioners often have noted that when children encounter a new concept they tend to overgeneralize that concept, using it even when it does not apply. For example, when some children learn about periods, they place a period after every word they write for a while until they come to complete understanding of the function of a period. Likewise, some of the less experienced teachers in this study learned somewhere that whole language meant literature

based instruction so they try to base everything on literature. They seem to be in a state of overgeneralization.

A personal anecdote comes to mind as I play with this analogy. When my nephew was in kindergarten, his teacher was launching into whole language for the first time. Early in the year, she attempted to inform the parents of what she had planned for the students and explained that it might "look" a bit different than her instruction in the past. She tried to explain the emergent aspect of coming to reading and writing. Unfortunately, the explanation was lost on my sister-in-law and what she reported to the family was that the kindergarten teacher was going to just wait for Brad to want to start reading and writing; and when he did, she would help him. Needless to say, that did not set well with the extended family. Knowing that I, too, was a kindergarten teacher, my mother-in-law came to me for an explanation. Though I tried to explain the concept a little more clearly, the damage was done; and I was not able to reassure my mother-in-law. She retorted, "Well, if that teacher sits there and waits for Bradley Amos Browning to come in from playing outside and get ready to sit down and learn to read and write, she is going to be sitting for a very long time!" That statement has been a cause for reflection many times over the past few years for me. I think perhaps my mother-in-law was onto something. Some people, teachers in this case, may not ever see the need to change with a bit of guidance. Like Brad, they may resist change.

In summary, all people, whether children or teachers, are "in process." Just as children need time and encouragement to learn to read and write, so do teachers need time

and encouragement to develop professionally. This leads to a discussion of the implications of this study for educators and for researchers.

IMPLICATIONS

For Educators

It seems clear from this study that teachers implementing whole language techniques promoted more literacy behaviors (i.e., decoding print, using semantic and syntactic clues as well as graphophonic clues, and writing), spent more time on literacy instruction, and held higher expectations for the children in the areas of reading and writing. Research (Dahl and Freppon, 1995; Meyer, et al., 1993; Stewart, 1992; Stipek, et al. 1995) in the area of literacy instruction with young children seems to indicate that these behaviors foster better readers and enhance motivation to read. Because of this support, it seems clear that such practice should be implemented in the kindergarten classroom.

Kenneth Goodman (1986) promoted the notion that whole language is a philosophy rather than a methodology. However, the propensity of several of the teachers in this study to view whole language as something they "do" rather than a way of thinking about how children come to literacy suggests that the "philosophy" aspect has been lost along the way. Whole language as a methodology, or a program, runs the risk of taking the same course that most educational programs take--being replaced by a newer program. However, whole language as a philosophy strikes a much deeper chord changing the way teachers think about literacy. Instructors in teacher training institutes may need to take

heed and attempt to help preservice teachers and graduate students see whole language as a philosophy rather than training them in the methodology.

The dynamic process of teacher development as illustrated by this study is another area of interest to higher education instructors. Many preservice teachers seem to believe that there is a way to teach children. Perhaps they would be better served by realizing that teachers go about the business of teaching in highly idiosyncratic ways that are constantly changing.

Finally, teacher training institutions may need to concentrate on helping preservice teachers develop their philosophies of teaching. Most of the teachers in this study never mentioned an underlying formal philosophy on which they based their planning and implementation of instruction. The lack of such a philosophy may be akin to a house with no foundation. Without a philosophy, teachers are exposed to every new concept that comes along and have no standard against which to measure it. The only standard they have is its appeal to them. Leah McIntire is an excellent example of a teacher who bases her decisions on a well developed and more "formal" philosophy of how children learn. She can articulate the philosophy and she obviously bases her curricular decisions on it rather than being swayed by any and every new program. Even though she stated that she "loved the whole language stuff," she does not exhibit all the behaviors of a whole language teacher. For example, although she reads to her children every day, she rarely rereads a story unless the children ask her to do so. She does, however, ask the children to write individually which is an extension of the group writing she has utilized for years. She bases her decisions on her philosophy rather than on a program.

One final difficulty with being "program based" rather than "philosophy based," centers around instructional decision making. For example, if a certain activity does not seem to work with a particular group of children, and a teacher is philosophy based, there is a foundation there for devising a new activity to accomplish the same objective. However, if a teacher is program based and the program does not work, there is nothing on which to fall back.

For Researchers

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, Troyer and Yopp (1990) expressed the concern that research is not being disseminated to teachers in a timely manner. This appears to be a valid concern based on the influences cited by the teachers in this study. Only two teachers indicated they ever read professional journals and those were not reports of research. Apparently, research was not viewed as relevant to these teachers. Educational researchers, it would seem, need to search for ways to inform teachers more directly of their findings. While teachers receive some results through indirect methods, such as inservice training and articles in teacher idea magazines, neither of these were highly cited as influential by this group of teachers. Therefore, researchers need to devise methods of reporting research directly to teachers in such a manner that it will be seen as relevant and also indicate how the research translates to practice.

This study also suggests areas for further research. More descriptive studies such as this and the Dahl and Freppon (1995) study are needed to complete the picture of literacy practices in kindergarten. Studies such as these assist researchers and educators in determining how research is translating to practice. Studies that attempt to explain the

differences in findings such as those reported under the review of literature in this study are needed. It may be that teachers do not attend more closely to research findings because of such discrepancies. If one study suggests one method and another suggests a different method, it will dissuade teachers from valuing the findings of any study.

Finally, long term descriptive studies of literacy instruction in kindergarten are needed. A limitation of this study is that it was merely a snapshot of one day in each of the classrooms. Further information was dependent upon the teachers' interpretations and memory of other literacy practices. Longer term studies would illuminate a much broader picture of literacy instruction in kindergarten.

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Appendix A

Literacy Instruction Study

Interview Guide

1. Background Questions
 - a. How long have you been teaching kindergarten?
 - b. What other grades have you taught? How long?
2. Describe a typical day in your classroom.
3. How did you decide what to teach when you first began teaching kindergarten? What were the influences on your decisions?
4. Has your teaching changed since you first began teaching? What prompted those changes?
5. Have you had any teaching practices you have tried in kindergarten and discarded? Explain.
6. How did teaching (first, second, etc.) grade influence the way you presently teach kindergarten?

OR

7. Contrast teaching (first, second, etc.) grade with teaching kindergarten.
8. What are your goals for your students in the areas of reading and writing? What do you want your children to know or be able to do by the end of the year?
9. Describe a typical literacy activity in your classroom.
10. What other literacy activities do you plan or provide?
11. Are your students required to take a standardized test in kindergarten? What do you see as the purpose of that test? How does the test influence your teaching?
12. Do you use children's literature (trade books) in your classroom? In what ways?
13. If you were free to teaching kindergarten in any way you chose, how would you do it?

14. Describe someone who teaches kindergarten differently than you do and explain how you differ.
15. Do you have a favorite "kindergarten story"?

Questions to follow observation:

1. How was today different from a typical day?
2. Ask about specific literacy activities that I observed. Please take me through it step-by-step. How did it go? How did the kids respond? What were you thinking at that time?
3. Talk about their reasoning and thought processes. What were you thinking about when you did . . . (cite a specific instance during the day)?
4. Ask my research question.
5. How do you think teachers get ideas? How are they influenced to change their practice?
6. Do you know a teacher who has made a significant change in the way he/she teaches? How did that change occur?
7. Ask them to describe the centers in the room. Probe their perceived purpose.
8. Describe something I saw a child, or group of children, doing and have teacher explain/interpret.

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to describe the literacy instruction of a particular group of kindergarten teachers and to discover the factors that influence the planning and implementation of literacy instruction in kindergarten. The central questions of this study are:

- 1) What are the literacy practices of kindergarten teachers?
- 2) What influences the literacy instruction of kindergarten teachers?

Notes will be taken about the literacy instruction observed in the classroom. The interviews will be audiotaped. Your responses to any inquiries during the study will be kept completely confidential as will the audiotapes. Anonymity will be maintained in future use of your input by this researcher except only where you wish to be identified as the source of a statement(s). One copy of this consent form will be stored along with the interview tapes in a filing cabinet in my home.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation in the study nor are there direct benefits to you. Your participation will, however, provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your experience and will help increase much needed knowledge concerning literacy instruction in the early years.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may opt to not answer any specific question or you may withdraw at any time. If you have any further questions about this project, please contact Pamela Browning at (615) 479-6343.

I fully understand the explanation of the study, and I agree to participate in the study.

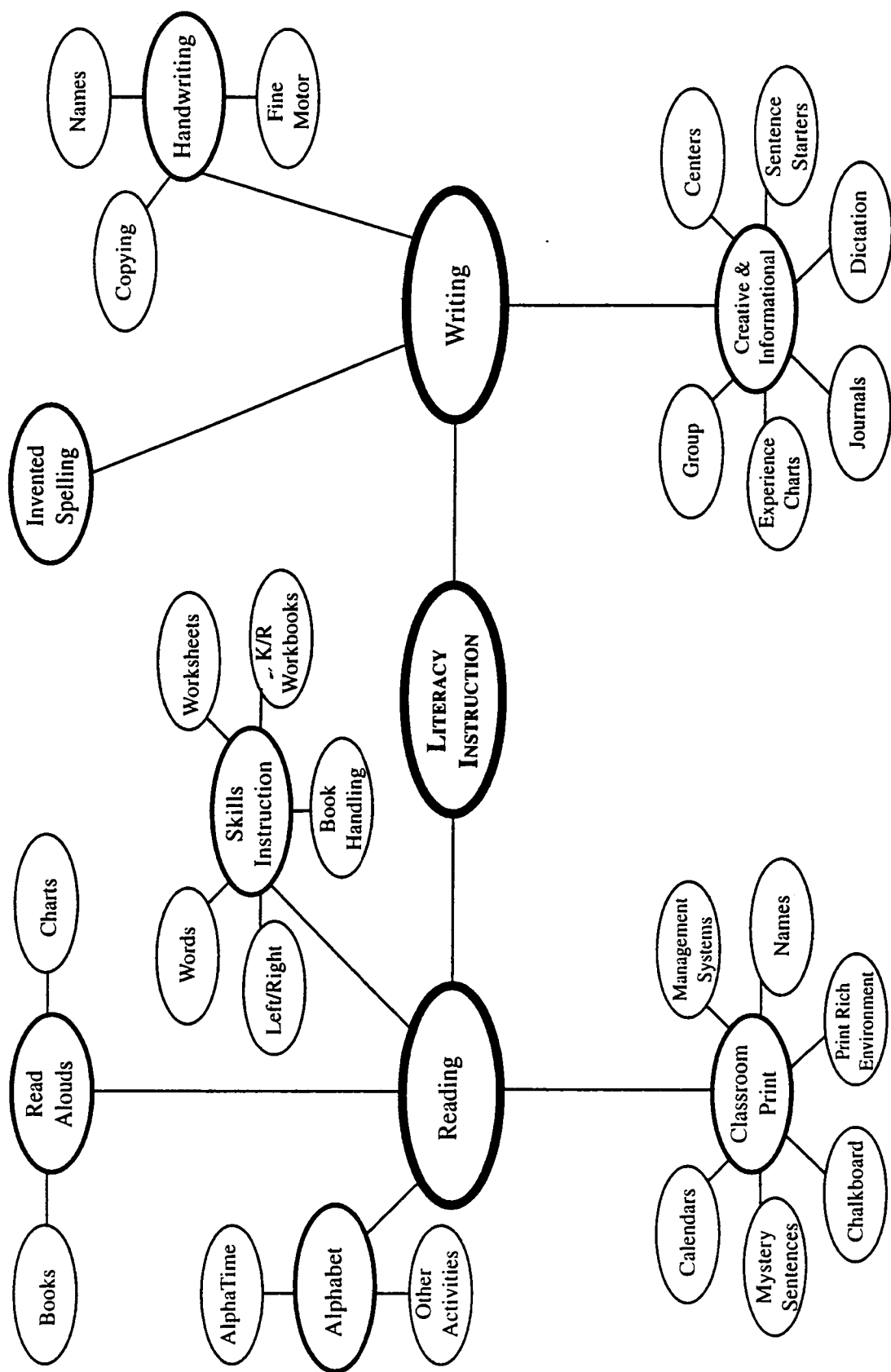
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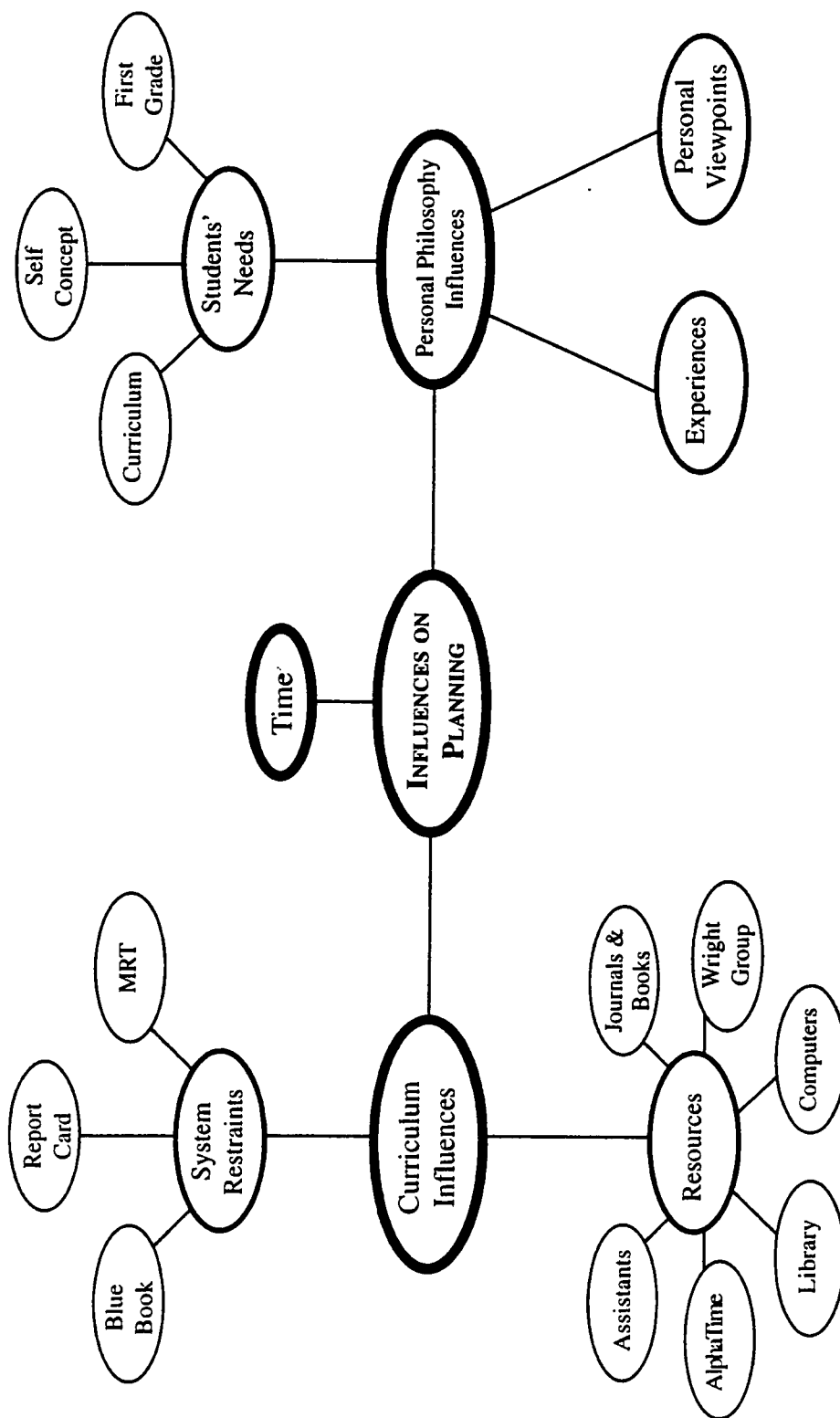
Date

I permit Pamela Browning to transcribe the audio tapes and use the information I provide for this study.

Signature

Appendix C





Appendix D

Descriptive Classroom Narrative--Candace Adams

As the children arrived they went to the front area of the room. Ms. Adams was sitting beside a yellow poster board chart on the floor. Across the top of the poster board were the words: "Do you think dinosaurs were..." The remainder of the poster board was divided into two sections "Bright colors?" and "Drab colors?" Mrs. Adams instructed the children to "Sign your name if you think they were bright colors, or if you think they were drab colors."

After the children signed in on the dinosaurs' colors chart, they went to their tables where a duplicated paper awaited them. The paper was a picture of three dinosaurs and some background plants. The dinosaurs are drawn with dashed lines. The written directions were:

Trace over the ----- lines.

Color the picture.

The children were reminded to trace with a pencil and color with crayons.

At approximately 8:10, Ms. Adams asked, "Has everyone signed their name now? You may finish these (the papers) at home. What I need right now is for you to put yours in your cubbies and come to the rug (the group time area at the front of the room)."

First, Ms. Adams reviewed what day yesterday was and what day tomorrow would be (the day of the week). She then sent a child to check the weather. He reported "sunny and foggy." The children helped Mrs. Adams decide how many days they had been in school in March by adding a tally mark to a small poster entitled "March Tally." Then they chorally recited the months of the year and days of the week.

Next Ms. Adams directed the children's attention to a "Mystery Sentence" written on sentence strips and attached to the chalkboard. The sentence read: "Dinosaurs were reptiles."

"I'll bet someone knows at least one of these words. Let's let John come up and use my pointer (a glitter baton)." John pointed to "dinosaur" and said it correctly. Another child took the pointer and identified "were." From there the class deciphered the entire sentence. "Why did we say 'Dinosaurs **were** reptiles' instead of 'Dinosaurs **are** reptiles'?" The children responded by saying that dinosaurs are extinct.

At this point, Ms. Adams introduced me to the class and told the class that they were going to do *Dinosaur Toes* for me. This is a book from the Wright Group that has been set to music. Mrs. Adams held the book so everyone could see while she tracked the print with her finger. She played the tape and the children joined in on the refrain (lustily to say the least):

Oh, my dinosaur toes, toes, toes, toes
Oh, his dinosaur toes.
And even his dinosaur nose, nose, nose, nose
Even his dinosaur nose.

"Today, I have this book about *Patrick's Dinosaur*, but you know what? It could have been *Sarah's Dinosaur*, *Steven's Dinosaur*, or *Megan's Dinosaur* (indicating several children in the class). The author is Carol Carrick. She has done a lot of books. The illustrations were done by Donald Carrick. Look at Patrick on the front cover. What do you think is going to happen? Maybe if I show you the back, too... You want to see the back?"

The children offered suggestions. Ms. Adams said, "Steven made a good point. He said on this page he looked scared--kind of like in *Where the Wild Things Are*."

Ms. Adams read the story very expressively using gestures. She interrupted her reading occasionally for clarification and/or questions. For example: "He's using his imagination (Patrick). He's imagining the dinosaur in his head....What does he mean when he says they are shrimpy?...What did I tell you about diplodocus' head? (His nostrils were on top of this head.)...Is his imagination on overtime?...big meat eater (comment about the picture of a tyrannosaurus rex)...What is the triceratops going to do? (hit him with his horns)...Why didn't he think that dinosaur ate leaves? (because he had sharp teeth). What kind of teeth did plant eaters have?...Look at Patrick. What's he thinking? Do you think the dinosaur was really there?...Do you think Patrick had a really good imagination?..."

After the book was finished, Ms. Adams told the children that she had a new chart for them.

I'm Bring Home a Baby Dinosaur

I'm bringing home a baby dinosaur

Won't my mommy fall right through the floor

I'm bring home a baby dinosaur

Gobble Gobble, Gobble, Gobble

Oops! He ate me!

The title was written in black. The lines of the song were written in an AB pattern alternating colors between purple and green.

Ms. Adams pointed to the title and then said, "Down here there are some words you might be able to read (indicating the song itself)." One child came to the chart and correctly identified "dinosaur." Another child stepped forward and pointed to "bringing" but did not say anything. Mrs. Adams said, "That word has an -ing on it. Did you notice that, boys and girls?...I see a first grade word (referring to 'the')."

Another child came forward and identified "mommy."

CA: How did you know that?

C: Because I know the song

CA: What is the song you know?

The child sang the familiar version of this song about "I'm bringing home a baby bumblebee." Ms. Adams explained to him that this song was very similar to that one, but this one was about a baby dinosaur.

Two more children came to the chart and identified the words "he" and "floor."

"Let's sing it, all right?" She sang and the children joined in. "You want to sing it one more time? Imagine for a minute. You're taking a baby dinosaur home. What would your mom do?" The class then sang the song again.

"The next thing I want us to do is write a sentence on the board. Remember a sentence is a complete thought. I will tell you the sneaky tricky letters as we go along."

The children identified the letters for her to write as she stretched the sounds to:

As I was walking
home from school,
I saw a _____
so I _____.

At the appropriate times, Ms. Adams pointed out that she had to start with a capital letter, and she modeled how to leave a space the equivalent of the width of two fingers between the words. She commented, "'e' in 'home' is a sneaky tricky letter... 'o' (in 'from') is a sneaky tricky letter."

As Ms. Adams was writing "home," a child finished, "...home from school!"

CA: How did you know?

C: Because that's in *Dinosaur Toes*.

Ms. Adams continued in the same manner. When she reached the end, she asked, "Why do we put a period?"

A child responded, "Because it's the end of the sentence."

"Here's when your part comes in. I'm going to give you a paper. You're going to say, 'I saw a **dinosaur**' but I'm not going to tell you how to spell it. You have to listen and figure it out yourself...What could you say (that you did when you saw the dinosaur)?"

One child suggested that they could say that they stepped on his toes. Ms. Adams responded, "You could say that or ...(gave more suggestions)...Let's look and read it one more time. If you need help, I'll be glad to help; but are we going to tell you every letter? (No!) No, you need to figure it out yourself." She instructed the children to illustrate their pictures after they had written. The assistant placed the papers on the tables, and the children went to their seats to begin.

The paper was blank except for the sentence across the top:

As I was walking home from school, I saw a

_____ so I _____.

Ms. Adams and her assistant walked around discussing with the children what they would write and helping sound out words. "You need to tell me on your paper..../Said? What do you hear in 'said'?".../"You've got to finish writing 'dinosaur' first.../What do you hear in 'dinosaur'? /d/ /d/ /d/. What do you hear next? /di-/ /di-/.../din o/ /din o/.../s/ /s/ /s/ (she waited for the child to write each letter).../You need to write that down and draw me an illustration.../Ok, 'I was walking home from school, I saw a....?...(looking at a paper) I see the dinosaur, but where are you? You need to be in the picture, too..../(stopping at one table to read what each child had written) I stepped on his toes...I stepped on his nose...I stepped on his tail... Mrs. Browning is not going to believe this incredible work you are doing!"

Two children came to show me their papers. The first one had written "pttd hm (petted him.)." The second one had written "sed bibi (said bye-bye)."

Ms. Adams collected the papers as the children finished. "When you finish you know what to do? I see people on the rug that know what to do." The children were reading books from the bookshelf.

"What do you hear before the 'f'? (/f/) Right, what letter is that" (f). Do you know how to write an 'f'? (The child shook her head.) You make an 'f' like this (wrote it on her paper)."

At 9:15, the principal came in with a large box. A letter was attached to the box, and on the box were the words "CAUTION/Handle with care." The children became quite excited when they saw the box. "Sit down on the rug, and I will read the letter to you." Ms. Adams read a typed letter from "Pete, the Paleontologist." There was a paper

made egg wrapped in a blanket in the box. The principal walked around so each child could see the contents of the box.

P: Wouldn't it be interesting to write a story about what happened today?

C: Maybe we could write him a letter.

P: Pete? That's a good idea.

Ms. Adams showed the principal the children's writings while the assistant asked the children to put their books away and line up to go to the library. When the children returned from the library at 9:45 the librarian came along to see the egg.

The children settled back onto the floor, and Ms. Adams held up the chart that the children had signed when they arrived. Someone noticed that she had signed her name under "drab colors." "Do you know why I thought that dinosaurs were greens and browns and grays?...Because they are reptiles, and most reptiles are drab colors." The children counted the number of names on both sides and determined which side had more.

Ms. Adams asked the children to tell me about another similar chart they had done. They signed their names under either "I do believe in leprechauns" or "I don't believe in leprechauns."

In preparation for center time, Ms. Adams discussed appropriate behavior at the "Dig Site" (the sand box). The children then moved to their centers. They knew to which center they were assigned because at each center there is a kite cutout with the names of those children assigned to that center.

Note: A description of the literacy related materials located in the centers follows this narrative.

At 10:10 the school had a fire drill; we had to evacuate the building. At 10:25 Ms. Adams flickered the light to indicate that it was time to clean up the centers.

At 10:30 Ms. Adams played the *Dinosaur Toes* tape and the children gathered on the "rug" (the entire room is carpeted; this is the way they refer to the group time area). She showed them the book as the tape played. Then they sang "I'm Bringing Home a Baby Dinosaur" from the chart again. "Let's do our other one that we have done before." They read "Five Enormous Dinosaurs" from the chart. This chart has all green print, but the number words at the beginning of each line are in a darker shade of green.

Ms. Adams held up a book and said, "I have a book that's sort of like it (the chart), but it is also different." A child recognized the title as *Five Enormous Dinosaurs*. "You're right. It says the same thing as that (pointed to the chart)." She read the book tracking the print. The book was teacher made.

The children went to lunch from 10:40 to approximately 11:15 and then put their heads on their tables for 5-10 minutes for a brief rest time.

At 11:25, Ms. Adams called the children back to the rug area to listen to three pages of the second part of the *Animal Island* series. She said, "Let's see just how sharp you are. What is happening in this picture?" She continued asking questions to review the story and probed answers. "Oh! It looks like they got to go in. (This is a comment about the illustration as she turned the page to begin the session)." She played the tape for that page and then asked questions about it.

CA: Carter, can you come up and point to something pink in the picture?

....Amanda, what letter does pink start with?

C: /p/ /p/

CA: And what letter is that?

C: P.

CA: There is something else that starts with a 'p.' I'll give you a clue: They are walking on it.

C: Path.

C2: You could say "pavement."

CA: Pavement would work.

She played the tape for the second page.

CA: What did they find in the grass?

C: Pennies.

CA: What color are pennies?.....(asked additional questions about the page)...Let's look at page 21. She asked additional questions after that page. "Chris , what did Sam sit on?...Jaclyn, do we usually find nails in the grass?...Ryan, what did Ann and Ted find on the last page? (a nickel)...What letter do you think they will find next?"

"We are going to play Hangman" while I call certain people to get their things together." Earlier she had asked a boy to take their writing papers to the teacher's lounge for the first grade teachers to see. At this point, she asked him to report to the class what the teachers had said.

"I am putting up a day of the week (in preparation for Hangman). I am putting up the vowels and remember if we put a mark through it, you don't need to say it again." She

drew the "stand" for the game and wrote the vowels across the top. She placed six blanks below the stand. The children took turns calling out letters until they solved the puzzle with "Monday."

At 11:40 the class went outside for recess. They returned just in time to leave for the day. As they were leaving Ms. Adams said, "Tell Mrs. Browning thank you for spending the day with us." Some of the children said the wrong name (the name of the assistant), so one child said, "Not Mrs. Harvey!" Mrs. Adams replied, "Mrs. Browning...-ing sound."

Description of literacy related materials at centers

Sand Box. The sand box has been turned into an archeological "Dig Sight" for the dinosaur unit. The words "Dig Sight" are on the lid of the box. There is a sign shaped like a bone hanging from the ceiling over the sandbox that reads "Digging up bones/CAUTION!!! CAUTION!" Standing on the lid is the book *Bones, Bones, Dinosaur Bones*, by Byron Barton.

Home Center. A large circle on the wall has the words "Home Center" on it. The refrigerator, drawers, table, sink, and stove have labels on them.

Block Center. There is a large circle with the name of the center on it.

Language Arts and Listening Center. The name of the center is posted on a large circle. There is print on the containers of the games and puzzles available at this center. Ms. Adams put the *Dinosaur Toes* tape in the tape recorder for the children at this center.

Reading Center. There is a poster that says "Reading Takes You Anywhere" and an alphabet poster. There is a child-sized rocking chair, two floor pillows, three stuffed bears, and one stuffed dinosaur. The titles available on the shelf vary in content. They include: *The Day of the Dinosaur*; *Under Water*; *Cookie Monster's Book of Cookie shapes*; *Where the Wild Things Are*; *My 'a' Book*; *The Trouble with Elephant*; *Ten Black Dots*; *Mary Wore Her Red Dress*; *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*; and *Roll Over!* There were several books from the Wright Group including: *The Jigaree*; *Grandpa, Grandpa*; *Yes Ma'am*; *Smarty Pants*; *Mrs. Wishy-Washy*; and *Sing a Song*. There were also books made by the class. One was entitled *I Can Find a _____*. Inside were pages completed by the children using invented spelling using the sentence "You can find a _____." The children also illustrated the pages. Another was *I See...* On each page were the words "I see" at the top. The children had drawn an illustration and cut it out in a shape similar to looking through binoculars. The teacher had taken dictation at the bottom of the illustration. The next one was an adaptation of *Imogene's Antlers*. This one appeared to be a group project because on the first page were the words "On Sunday, Imogene grew _____." On each successive page were the following days of the week using the same sentence format. There was also a teacher made big book of *Aikendrum*.

Art Center. The name of the center is on a large circle.

Description of print in the room

--The children's names are on tape at their seats as well as on ziploc baggies that store their crayons and on pieces of masking tape at the rug area.

- There are signs on the restroom doors (GIRLS/WOMEN'S and BOYS/MEN'S).
- On a poster by the teacher's desk: "It's because we're so different from each other that we have so much to share."
- There are calendars and schedules on the wall near the teacher's desk.
- There is a box labeled "Recycle" under the sand table.
- There are "Quiet Class" awards from the librarian taped to the wall.
- There are labels on several items including: file cabinet, flag, chalkboard, blocks, door, cubbies, coat closet, aquarium, Treasure Chest, and soap.
- On the wall along with self portraits of the children are the words "WALL OF FAME."
- There are several decorative posters: "It's Not Easy Being Me," "The foundation of understanding is the willingness to listen," "It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This!"
- There is a globe available that has the continents, countries, oceans, etc. labeled.
- On the left side of the chalkboard is a cutout of a hand that is labeled "Left" and on the right side there is one labeled "right."
- There is a big book for science and math sitting on top of a low shelf.
- There is a missing teeth bulletin board. There are 12 cutouts of teeth labeled with the months of the year. On some of the months are children's names. Below that are photographs of children with missing teeth.
- There is "Our Weather Chart" beside the calendar. There is a bar graph indicating how many days of each kind of weather.

--On the other side of the calendar is a large thermometer. Below are bear cutouts with the days of the week written on them. There are three labels (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow) below the bears that are moved each day to the correct positions.

--There is an alphabet chart above the chalkboard that is shaped like a series of ships. Each ship has two letter pairs along with items beginning with those two sounds.

--The helper chart is shaped like a bird feeder. The top says "Welcome" and there are small poles sticking out all the way down the main pole that are labeled with the classroom jobs. Each child's name is written on a bird. When their bird is on the "Line Leader" pole, that is their job.

--There are notes on the door.

--Above the reading center is a bulletin board for "Today's News." There is a menu attached to the bulletin board, and Ms. Adams told me that on Fridays she puts up notes for each child.

--The children's first and last names are on their cubbies.

--On top of the cubbies is a sign "Tokens for good behavior in the cafeteria." Beside this sign are several pieces of paper with a picture of a bear and the word "Token."

--There are cutouts of dinosaurs with name labels.

--There is a poster listing the classroom rules:

1. Follow the teachers' directions.
2. Keep hands, feet, and objects to ourselves.
3. Use inside voices and take turns talking.
4. Please walk in the building, don't run.

5. Take care of your things and put them away.

--There is a management chart labeled "Tubbing." Tubbing is a classroom activity similar to centers. This chart indicates which group gets which tub on which day.

--There is a sign "Behavior Charts." Near it are umbrella shaped blank calendars with small dot stickers.

--There is a poster with photographs of the children engaged in various activities. There are captions under each photograph.

--Above the sink are different colored cat cutouts with the color words on them.

--The AlphaTime inflatables are behind the sink.

--There is a growth chart labeled "The Growing Tree: Welcome to the Growing Club."

--On the outside of the door (and extending to the wall) is a very large dinosaur with the sign "WE THINK DINOSAURS WERE 'DINOMITE.'"

--In the hall there are mounted photographs of the children taken peeking through a picture of an astronaut. Above each photograph are the words "If I had a rocket..." The children have completed the sentence using invented spelling, and the teacher has written their words below in conventional spelling.

VITA

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Her professional career has included eleven years of public school teaching (K-3) and six years of college teaching. She is presently an Assistant Professor in the Education Department of Lee College on leave to serve a one year faculty position in the School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.